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State of mind:
a 16-page
supplement

NOVEMBER 7/8 2020

FT Weekend Magazine

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The Thai monarchy was
all-powerful. Then came
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John Reed reports



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ADAMA JALLOH

'The camera was, for me, a kind of shield'

Artist and film-maker John Akomfrah, p48



'Humble sausages can go well beyond ordinary bangers and mash'

Ravinder Bhogal recipe, p54



'Walking felt freeing, even in one of the most densely populated cities on earth'

A 16-page special on keeping calm in testing times

FT Weekend Magazine

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CLAER BARRETT

OPENING SHOT

This year, let's have a Christmas reset



As the British government delayed *Strictly Come Dancing* last weekend to reverse spin into a second lockdown, there was one question that people demanded an answer to more than any other: what about Christmas?

The UK economy might be turning into a turkey, but who we might (or might not) be able to share a butter-basted crown with on December 25 seems to be a greater issue of national importance. Boris Johnson is adamant the current restrictions in England will be eased by the beginning of December. Does anyone believe him? He'd have more luck convincing people Santa Claus is real.

People have been longing for a "normal" Christmas, but that's just not going to happen. Like a giant antibacterial wipe, Covid-19 threatens to sweep away the traditional whirl of parties, work dos, school nativity plays, Christmas-shopping crowds and extended family get-togethers.

Having resigned ourselves to a "different" Christmas, maybe it's time for a festive reset. Even before lockdown was announced, many friends told me they would celebrate separately this year. One secretly admitted that, after a stressful year, she was looking forward to a low-key Christmas at home with her children, without having to drive halfway around the country to see her in-laws, her divorced parents and their new partners.

Yes, it's a wrench not to see our relatives. And I suspect many will opt to test their eyesight by driving to celebrate with their nearest and dearest. Still, the last thing I want to give my parents this year is coronavirus. Meeting our adult children for a walk complete with hip flasks and a few surreptitious turkey sandwiches is probably the best my husband and I can hope for.

We may as well rename Amazon Prime "Santa" now that non-essential shops in England have been forced to close for a month or more. The last lockdown cost them an estimated £1.6bn a week in lost sales – but this is the season where many do the bulk of their trading. The large internet retailers are going to be delivering Christmas pretty much single-handedly this year, puffing the hype around "Black Friday" and "Cyber Monday" to previously unknown levels.

Experts predict a delivery crunch as people start panic-buying gifts. Some even think families could spend more money than last year to compensate for not being able to deliver a gift in person. Such "gift inflation" is a dangerous thought, with the nation divided between those whose finances have emerged relatively unscathed from the pandemic and those who have lost their jobs, most of their incomes or even their businesses.

Richard Hyman, the independent retail analyst, thinks smaller celebrations mean spending will be much more subdued. "Retailers bought Christmas stock in the summer months when things were opening up, assuming that the gradual

recovery would continue," he says. The sudden lockdown means "even the strong retail businesses are worried that they've got too much stock". For the smaller independent retailers, this could prove ruinous. What can we do to help them?

Let's start with gift-buying. I am going to try and stick to the maxim of "ABA": Anything But Amazon. I'm not knocking its management team, who performed spectacularly during the pandemic, but it does not need my money. Many local "non-essential" retailers really do, and I want their shops and websites to still be trading next

'I am going to try and stick to the maxim of "ABA": Anything But Amazon. It does not need my money'

Christmas. Shops are allowed to operate click-and-collect and delivery services; many will post orders, having completed a digital reboot under the first lockdown. The UK launch of Bookshop.org this week – a platform that brings together 130 indies – filled me with festive cheer.

Although Hyman expects clothing sales to be the hardest hit (I mean, would you buy a new party dress just for Zooming in?), toys and tech are expected to outperform. Children – especially the fear of bored children – are the reason why. With the lurch away from cash, a tenner stuffed inside a card doesn't quite cut it these days.

And then there is food. All the supermarkets have Christmas brochures displaying feasts of a size likely to be outlawed, but are now hurriedly stocking smaller turkeys. With so many other traditions going by the wayside, why not have a venison Wellington instead? Or, as one friend is doing, moules and frites? (It's her favourite – and nobody else will be there to object.)

There are plenty of specialist food and drink retailers on the high street and online that would appreciate a slice of your spend. If you're sending your own food parcels and want to avoid queues in the Post Office, download the Royal Mail app, which shows locations of new "Parcel Postboxes" and sells online postage.

Even though we're more likely to share Christmas food with friends via Instagram this year, I suspect the allure of baking under lockdown is going to turbocharge "Stir-up Sunday". Mum insists she will still make her Christmas cake, a spectacular brandy-infused creation topped with gem-like crystallised fruits. I have already sourced these for her, even though I worry I may not be able to visit and enjoy a slice. "Don't worry, darling," she said. "It keeps for ages. We've only just finished eating last year's." **FT**

.....
Claer Barrett is the FT's consumer editor
claer.barrett@ft.com; [@ClaerB](#)
Simon Kuper is away



INVENTORY JADE ANOUKA,
ACTOR AND POET

‘I’ve always wanted
to be a superhero’

Jade Anouka, 30, has appeared in ITV dramas *Trauma* and *Cleaning Up* and Netflix’s *Turn Up Charlie*. Her stage roles include leads in the all-female Shakespeare trilogy at London’s Donmar Warehouse. Her first book of poetry, *Eggs on Toast*, was published in 2016.

What was your childhood or earliest ambition?

When I was really young, I used to always draw pictures of myself as a pop star with a guitar, singing on stage. It’s hilarious to me now.

Private school or state school?

University or straight into work?

An all-girls Catholic school in Bexleyheath. For sixth form, Christ The King, a mixed sixth-form college in Lewisham, where my drama teacher told me and a friend about the National Youth Theatre and got us auditions. The school paid for our two-week course. It changed everything – “Oh, right, acting, you can do that?” I cancelled all my university applications for computer design, went to drama school and did a three-year degree course at Guildford School of Acting.

Who was or still is your mentor?

[Director] Phyllida Lloyd. It was 2012 when I met her for the first *Julius Caesar* at the Donmar and we’ve continued to work together.

How physically fit are you?

Pretty fit. I’m quite an active person – I tend to walk places, run up stairs. I tend to only go to the gym when I’ve got a part and need to be a bit fitter. I don’t feel I’m a fitness freak – I do enough to be able to have some nice meals.

Ambition or talent: which matters more to success?

You can’t have one without the other.

How politically committed are you?

As a queer, black woman, I feel like just by existing I’m pretty political.

What would you like to own that you don’t currently possess?

A house with stairs and a back garden.

What’s your biggest extravagance?

Before lockdown, going out for dinner. Now, takeaway, ordering out from restaurants I love.

In what place are you happiest?

When I go for a big walk with my dog. There are woods that I love walking in – there’s a calmness.

What ambitions do you still have?

In terms of career, to have a lead role on screen – to be the lead

character, where the story is their story. I’ve been lucky enough to have that in theatre.

What drives you on?

The fact that, for all the ups and downs in this career, I still feel very fortunate to be working in a job I love.

What is the greatest achievement of your life so far?

Various moments. For example, when I got cast in *Cleaning Up* – my first big role of that kind. To be in something like the Shakespeare trilogy, to play amazing lead roles alongside Harriet Walter, to be directed by Phyllida Lloyd. And my character in *His Dark Materials*, the witch Ruta Skadi, is nearest to the character I want to be – I’ve always wanted to be a superhero.

What do you find most irritating in other people?

Fake wokeness.

If your 20-year-old self could see you now, what would she think?

“OH MY GOD, you’re an actor.

How did you manage that?” It was the dream, and 20-year-old Jade wanted it very much, but I found it hard to believe I would be able to pay my rent from acting work.

Which object that you’ve lost do you wish you still had?

I had a yellow car – my first ever car. I shared it with my brother and unfortunately he wrote it off. I loved that car!

What is the greatest challenge of our time?

To achieve true equality between all people: fairness, with every human being seen as equal.

Do you believe in an afterlife?

Some people say once a Catholic, always a Catholic. I went to a Catholic school, I went to church every week – in theory I should believe, but I’m not a Catholic any more. Scientists say energy never disappears but moves between things, and when we die that energy has to go somewhere. I believe it moves somewhere else, but I don’t know how.

If you had to rate your satisfaction with your life so far, out of 10, what would you score?

9.5. I still have ambitions and there are things I would like to improve and change, but it would be a lie to say my life isn’t great. **BT**

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Interview by Hester Lacey.

Jade Anouka appears in “*His Dark Materials*”, which returns to BBC One on November 8

PRADA

LUNA ROSSA
CARBON





ROBERT SHRIMSLEY THE NATIONAL CONVERSATION

Magna Carta: not hard and fast on soft play

Of all the surreal moments of the UK's coronavirus lockdown, few will top the seemingly genuine video of the boss of a soft-play centre telling two visiting police officers to read the passage from the Magna Carta he had hung on a nearby wall. The cops are there to tell him he is open in breach of Covid-19 regulations, but the owner knows he has the law on his side. Take that, copper! You should have read your 1215 statutes before you came in here quoting Tier 3 regulations at me.

Perhaps he was relying on the clause stating: "No Earl or Baron in possession of a soft-play centre may be compelled to close the climbing area, ball pits or the plastic slides, or be ordered to clean it with Dettol wipes every 15 minutes." However, this was removed from the texts after the Black Death was found to have spread largely via the bouncy castles of Plantagenet England.

No doubt this argument might have worked on medieval law enforcement. "Gadzooks man, it sayeth here that we may not shut down this soft-play centre." "You're right, we shall have to do him for witchcraft instead."

OK, I made that clause up. But there is one that requires guardians to maintain "houses, parks, fish preserves, ponds [and] mills". It does not specifically mention soft-play centres but it would certainly cover crazy-golf courses.

Apparently Clause 61 - a general defence of liberty - is the favoured defence. Another tweeter, called British Lives Matter, insists that displaying it prevents you being fined or closed for breaking lockdown regulations, presumably in the same way that carrying a rabbit's foot brings you luck, or drinking disinfectant prevents you from catching Covid-19.

But perhaps one of the cops was a descendent of Gerard de Athée -



ILLUSTRATION BY LUCAS VARELA

specifically precluded from holding office under Clause 50, along with his kinsmen "Engelard de Cigogné, Peter, Guy, Andrew de Chanceaux, Guy de Cigogné" and several others. (This one's real, look it up.)

The citing of Magna Carta in general life has always been a bit of a giveaway. I remember covering planning-committee meetings as a local reporter and seeing a well-spoken figure grandly explaining that a particular development fell foul of it and would have to be abandoned. The committee heard him in grave silence. Work on the site started two months later. Since then, the confident declaration of a Magna Carta defence has seemed a sure sign of a lost cause.

Four of the 63 clauses of Magna Carta are still held to have some validity in English law, and two in particular are a cornerstone of individual rights under the justice system. A close textual analysis of the remaining 59 suggests limited modern application. There are, for example, several parts of the Thames now openly flouting Clause 33's ban on fish weirs.

Incidentally, the much-cited Clause 61 has quite a bit about the 25 barons who will enforce it. Mind you, *The 25 Barons* would be a good action-hero series - a bit

like *The A-Team* but mainly looking out for illegal weirs.

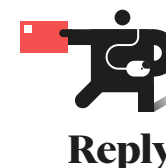
Magna Carta was a vital step on the path to individual freedoms and the parliamentary democracy that passed the Covid-19 laws. But it is now, as the estimable David Allen Green puts it, "an ornament, not an instrument". So why the continued reference to it? There are, after all, serious arguments against the restrictions but Magna Carta is not one of them.

The answer, I think, is that it is essentially used by people who do not like a particular law and think it should not apply to them but have no actual legal defence. Citing Magna Carta also plays to their puffed-up sense of being the true defenders of the nation, which at least adds irony to its deployment against a government of Brexiters. In any case, it is the self-righteous person's legal equivalent of shouting, "Don't want to!"

In the US, they would all carry guns, be anti-vaxxers and have "Live Free or Die" stickers on their cars. In the UK, they just stick up pictures of the Magna Carta and moan about face masks. We should be grateful for small mercies. **FT**

robert.shrimsley@ft.com

@robertshrimsley



Thank you for explaining in depth and so clearly the relation between the destruction of natural habitats, the illegal wild-animal trade and zoonotic viruses ("The next pandemic: where is it coming from and how do we stop it?", October 31/November 1). Let's hope that lessons learnt from Covid-19 contribute to people changing their habits and becoming more considerate in their choices.

Nathalie Male via FT.com



@gbezard October 28

Excellent @DaveLeeFT piece on Uber via @FT. @Uber CEO gives cash as an example of what Uber could deliver in the future. Not the utmost visionary statement at a time of declining cash usage

With reference to "What next for Uber? Inside the fight for its future", (October 31/November 1). Dara Khosrowshahi is a classic operator, not an innovator or trailblazer. What Uber needed was a grown-up to root out the bad from the Travis Kalanick era. However, now that Covid-19 is killing rideshare, Khosrowshahi needs to put Uber on the path to innovation and margins. I'm not sure he's the right man, but time will tell.

TechIPO via FT.com

Some of Ai Weiwei's answers ("Inventory", October 31/November 1) gave me a bit of a jolt, particularly his thoughts on success: "I would say success is when a person finds himself or herself." How many of us can say that we are successful by that standard?

Peregrine1 via FT.com

Re "A Highway Code fit for a Barbarian Plus world" (October 31/November 1). How could Robert Shrimsley conjure up such a hilarious image as driverless cars having to click photos of traffic lights before starting, "to prove that they aren't a robot"? Brilliant! Fay Garey Salisbury

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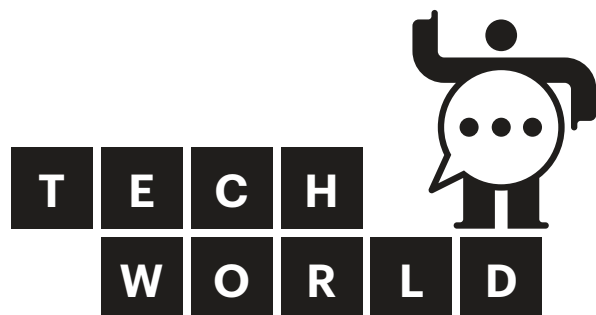
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BLACK BAY BRONZE



BY TIM BRADSHAW IN LONDON

The hidden dangers of orphaned data

There is a cynical old saying in the cyber-security business: “There are two types of companies – those that have been hacked and those that don’t know it yet.”

Internet security providers can often seem as though they expend more energy scaremongering than in online protection. But a recent experience makes me worry that the cliché is not pessimistic enough. The real problem is that most of us will never find out when our personal data goes astray.

This summer, freelance security researcher Roni Suchowski came to the FT with an alarming discovery. He had found 44,000 health records, most in PDF form, on a server without any protection at all. There was no encryption, no password – the door had not been so much left unlocked as swinging in the breeze.

The number of people compromised may seem small at a time when we routinely report on data breaches affecting tens of millions of people. But here were entire medical histories, some running to hundreds of pages, listing years of visits to doctors and hospitals and their prescriptions, plus names, addresses and phone numbers. The data had been available for months for any online passer-by to download. It was a gift to fraudsters and blackmailers.

Accessing it would scarcely seem like hacking, simply using the file transfer protocol (which is decades-old) and knowing where to look. The scanning tool Suchowski used to spot the unprotected database is cheaper than a Netflix subscription.



ILLUSTRATION BY PÂTÉ

He says he often makes this kind of discovery – most recently he came upon data from a clinic treating eating disorders and from a travel company – though he rarely finds such a large volume of intimate documents with so little protection.

Suchowski tried to warn the companies that he believed owned the database but received no reply, prompting him to contact us. After the FT started making inquiries, some basic security protections were placed on the server. It was unclear how many hackers might already have accessed it.

In the meantime, nobody would take responsibility for owning the database. Some 20 different companies’ names and web addresses were associated with the server and none could be pinned down as the “data controller” – the legally significant term that would

‘The 44,000 health records had been available for months for any online passer-by to download. It was a gift to fraudsters and blackmailers’

hold them accountable under data protection law.

Any UK company involved in a data breach must report it to the Information Commissioner’s Office within 72 hours of becoming aware of it. Yet more than two months after I first approached the three companies that seemed the most likely culprits – two medical-legal document-processing businesses and the IT outsourcer in Pakistan that both had contracted – the ICO says it has received no such disclosure from any of them.

That presents a conundrum for the ICO. Without a breach report or a complaint from the unknowing victims, there is nothing to investigate. No probe, no fine – and no embarrassing headline in the FT. “As individuals we are pretty limited in the control we can exercise in these situations,” says Judith Rauhofer, a senior lecturer in IT law at the University of Edinburgh and adviser to the Open Rights Group, which campaigns for better online protections.

This kind of exposure of orphaned data happens all the time. We just never hear about it, so we assume our medical records, tax returns and travel documents are safe. Often, they are not.

Most of the debate about data privacy has focused on Big Tech such as Google and Facebook, which scoop up vast quantities of our personal details. Yet at least these Silicon Valley companies have the resources, capabilities and incentive to lock down their systems properly. The minutiae of our personal bureaucracy, however, are routinely entrusted to small businesses that fail to protect them, either by hiring cheap outsourced developers, skipping regular security audits or relying on antiquated IT systems. As the best tech talent continues to flow to the ever-growing Silicon Valley giants, smaller companies are only going to be further starved of the IT smarts they need.

As citizens, we expect our governments to provide a basic level of physical protection. Yet when it comes to our online safety, there is just one underpowered regulator in the UK.

How 44,000 people’s medical records came to be languishing on an unprotected server for months is still a mystery. The fact that none of the victims will ever know how close their data came to getting stolen should offer little comfort to the rest of us. **FT**

Tim Bradshaw is the FT’s global tech correspondent

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One consequence of working from home is that mistakes are made. People miss messages; spinning plates fall to the ground; the falcon cannot hear the falconer; a New Yorker journalist broadcasts his genitals to everyone else on a Zoom call.

Much has rightly been written about the emotional challenges of remote working, the difficulty of spotting colleagues in distress and the inadequacy of email as a way of providing support and kindness.

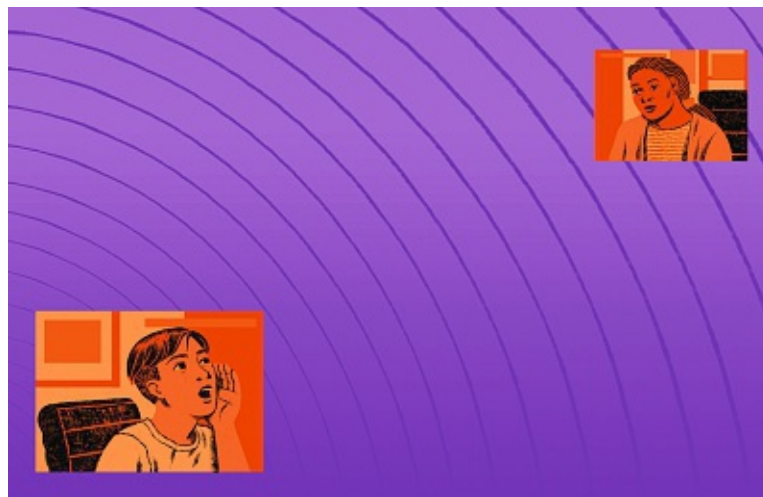
What gets less attention is the simple communication error. It is remarkable that activities for which face-to-face co-ordination seemed essential can be conducted from kitchen tables across the world. Yet eventually the cracks start to show: everything from missed emails causing missed meetings to yawning chasms of understanding about fundamental goals.

I have been searching for solutions. One source of inspiration is the humble credit card. I learnt recently from *A Podcast of Unnecessary Detail* that what looks like a 16-digit credit card number is in fact a 15-digit number plus a check digit. The check digit is calculated using a formula that involves each of the other digits. If any single digit is mistyped, the check digit will not match; most transpositions, such as typing 47 instead of 74, will also be detected.

Check digits are a specific instance of the general principle that redundant information can reduce errors. Redundant information comes with a cost. It takes up space (if you are a digital message such as a credit-card number) or time and attention (if you are a human). But the price may be worth paying.

We can use a phonetic alphabet, which takes much more time, to give a postcode over a patchy phone line. Do you live in east Bristol (BS5) or between Shrewsbury and Stoke-on-Trent (TF9)? “Tango Foxtrot Niner” is quite distinct from “Bravo Sierra Five”. Languages such as English already include considerable redundancy. That’s why you can probably read this sentence, even with the vowels removed.

For meetings, I specify both the date and the day of the week. A mismatch is an opportunity to notice the problem. Automatic error correction is even better. I used to be irritated when people sent me electronic calendar invitations to events I’d already noted down. Now I realise it’s a valuable opportunity to make sure everyone has the same



TIM HARFORD

THE UNDERCOVER ECONOMIST



The WFH chasm: are there any solutions?

understanding of what is going on. A well-crafted invitation includes the correct link for a meeting and the contact details of everyone involved, and automatically ensures that everyone has the same timings, no matter their time zone. Manually assembling such information from email chains, phone calls or, worst of all, PDFs offers opportunities for error.

Brevity helps if it focuses attention on critical information. Too often I receive emails with a subject such as “URGENT PLEASE READ”, when the entire message could be within the subject line: “The 4pm meeting is postponed to 4.15pm.”

But brevity can also be a trap. Tom Standage’s book *The Victorian Internet* describes the woes of Philadelphia wool broker Frank Primrose, who in June 1887 sent a telegram that used a compressed code. (Telegrams were expensive and charged by the letter, so such codes were common.)

The message read BUY ALL KINDS QUO rather than BAY ALL KINDS QUO, leading Primrose’s agent to erroneously buy half a million pounds of wool. A little more redundancy in the telegraph message would have saved Primrose a small fortune. These

days, most messages with such high stakes would come with error detection built in, as with the check digit on a credit card.

Catastrophic typos are easily spotted, but a more insidious threat is the slow accumulation of what the psychologist James Reason calls “latent conditions”. In an industrial context, latent conditions might include an untidy pile of flammable oily rags in the corner of a workshop, a fire alarm that is out of batteries and a blocked fire escape. None of these latent conditions will cause trouble, until a stray cigarette causes a fatal fire.

For an organisation with an ambitious project to deliver, the flat batteries and the blocked fire escape are metaphorical. Colleagues working together on a project can find themselves labouring under very different assumptions about deliverables, budget, priorities and even who is handling which tasks. The mismatch of beliefs can persist for a long time until a sudden and perhaps catastrophic moment of realisation. As the saying goes, it’s not the things you don’t know that cause trouble – it’s the things you do know that aren’t true.

A related issue is when some participants fear that a project is

‘It is remarkable that activities for which face-to-face co-ordination seemed essential can be conducted from kitchen tables. Yet the cracks eventually show’

badly flawed, but there is no easy, informal way for them to pull a superior to one side and discreetly express their disquiet. One can’t help wondering if this summer’s bungling of grades for cancelled exam results in the UK would have been quite so shambolic if everyone concerned had regularly seen each other face to face.

There is no easy solution to this problem. Error detection is an endless process. One possibility is to reduce the level of complexity by pursuing projects that involve fewer people, simpler technology and more slack. Another is to embrace brief, frequent conversations to ensure everyone is on track. Are we sure this is a good idea? Without those frequent informal checks, things fall apart. **FT**

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Tim Harford’s new book is “How to Make the World Add Up”. For Tim’s “Fantasy Dinner”, see page 59



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'Thailand belongs to the people, not the king'

Over the past four months, tens of thousands of young people have taken to the streets of Bangkok, demanding reform of the government and – almost unthinkable in this conservative kingdom – of the venerated monarchy itself. *John Reed* meets the student leaders fighting for their country's future. Photographs by *Watsamon Tri-yasakda*



T

'I don't know how far this is going to go, how many years, but in the end this movement will succeed'

Panusaya 'Rung' Sithijirawattanakul



he protesters, bleary-eyed from sleeplessness but flush with adrenaline, chanted "Down with feudalism, long live the people!" as they moved straight for the Grand Palace.

It was early on September 20 and Panusaya Sithijirawattanakul, a leader of a radical faction of students from Thailand's Thammasat University, was demanding to see a representative of the king's privy council that morning. She dismounted the truck she was standing on and walked towards the palace, which was guarded by hundreds of police.

King Maha Vajiralongkorn, or Rama X, lives mostly in Bavaria, Germany, and had only been back in Bangkok briefly during this pandemic year. The royal flag, flown when the monarch is presiding at home, was up, although the king - as has been the case for most of 2020 - was not in.

Panusaya, 22, who goes by the nickname Rung ("rainbow"), carried a list of 10 demands to reform the monarchy, the institution at the pinnacle of Thailand's political order. These included cutting royal budgets and abolishing the lèse-majesté or royal insult law that jails those convicted of defaming the royal family for up to 15 years. She has become one of the best-known faces of a movement with many leaders; one cartoon showed her standing on a truck, wielding a flame-throwing guitar.

The rally began with the kind of irreverent festival antics typical of Thailand's past four months of near-daily protests. A boy posed in a midriff-baring crop top - a garment associated with the king, who has been photographed wearing them in Germany - as a girl mock-venerated him in the ritual prostration Thais adopt at royal audiences. Jutatip "Ua" Sirikhan, the leader of the Thai Students' Union, stood outside Thammasat selling LOVE CAT HATE COUP T-shirts - a reference to the military's dozen seizures of power over the past century.

But proceedings turned more serious around 11pm, when Rung took the stage. "My name is Panusaya Sithijirawattanakul," she said, addressing Vajiralongkorn directly and startling listeners by dispensing with the phraseology Thais must use when speaking to the king. "I'm one of the people you might see as mere dust under your feet. I'd like to tell you that dust like us has rights and voices too."

Without naming the king, Arnon Nampa, another protest leader, recounted a list of questions for him, including a request to cut royal spending at a time when some Thais were skipping meals. "Don't you see the country is suffering?" he asked.



After the students left the stage, the sound of power tools was heard. By morning, a plaque bearing the date September 20 had been planted in Sanam Luang (Royal Ground), a former public plaza alongside the palace used mostly for events honouring Thailand's powerful monarchy. The plaque bore the bold and, to many Thais, revolutionary, if not seditious, declaration that "Thailand belongs to the people, not the king, as they deceived us". Many Thai media declined to translate the inscription in full for fear of breaking the law.

That morning, Rung presented the students' demands to Bangkok's chief of metropolitan police, then turned to the crowd and posed for pictures, her fingers raised in the protesters' now famous three-fingered salute. "We have won," Arnon declared. "We have won."

This is not a story about Thailand's multibillionaire king, though he increasingly sits at the centre of it. It is about the young people - or as they call themselves, with a sense of their place in history, "The People" - who are challenging the kingdom's constitutional order and the culture of unques-

tioned reverence for the monarchy. Their fight for democratic rights against forbidding odds is being followed closely at home and abroad.

With a remarkable degree of self-possession - and courage, given the threats of imprisonment or death that royal critics face - they are questioning everything they have been taught in school. Their anthem is "Do You Hear the People Sing?" from the musical *Les Misérables*, which has the refrain: "A people who will not be slaves again."

Thailand's student movement began coalescing in July around a pro-democracy group called Free Youth, which demanded Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha resign. As the protests grew, it aligned itself with the People's Party (later The People) and began making further demands, most notably limits on the power of the king, something that was previously unthinkable.

The students see themselves as the heirs to generations of Thai leftists who have fought the kingdom's illiberal order for the past century. But this is a movement unlike any Thailand has seen before.



**'No one wanted to
be the first to say it,
to mention the monarchy
– the elephant in the room.
These students are brave'**

**Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit,
former leader of Future Forward**

Young people with ideas about upending the country's feudal hierarchy are a recurring theme in Thailand. In 1932, King Prajadhipok, Vajiralongkorn's great-uncle, faced an uprising by officers and civil servants, who imposed a constitution on him. This revolt remains the historical touchstone for the new generation of protesters. A few years later, the king's assets and land were put in the care of the Crown Property Bureau (CPB), essentially Thailand's sovereign wealth fund.

But from that low point, Vajiralongkorn's father, King Bhumibol Adulyadej, built back the monarchy's power and public esteem, with the help of a powerful military and the support of the Americans, who saw his country as an important anti-communist regional ally.

The cultish, gilded portraits of royal family members on Thai roadsides and in buildings proliferated during Bhumibol's 70-year reign, which ended with his death in 2016. So did the strengthening of laws shielding the family from criticism, most notoriously the lèse-majesté law.

Thailand has been run by a triumvirate of power – palace, governments and the military – throughout its modern history. Some Thais add as a fourth pillar the prodigious Chinese-Thai family conglomerates that have grown rich and built the economy in symbiosis with the royal house. When things get out of hand, the military steps in, as happened in 2014 when Prayuth, then army chief, led a coup against populist Yingluck Shinawatra's elected government. Afterwards, the regime sent scores of dissidents to "attitude adjustment" sessions, and some fled into exile.

When Vajiralongkorn took the throne in 2016, he set about further strengthening the trappings of royal power even as he lived abroad. In 2017 he took ownership of the CPB's assets, company shares and land worth more than \$40bn; last year he assumed command over two army regiments. In 2019, he was crowned Rama X in a lavish ceremony and borne on a gilded palanquin through Bangkok.

But young Thais, surfing the web and already questioning the order of things, saw a very different image of their king outside his country, where he spent most of his time in a villa near Munich and more recently in an Alpine hotel. They shared candid photos showing the king and his household relaxing in crop tops or other informal dress.

"From being a taboo subject, the monarchy is now front and centre," Thitinan Pongsudhirak, a ►

Top right and above left: Ratchaprasong Intersection protests, Bangkok, October 15
Top left: student leader Panusaya 'Rung'

Sithijirawattanukul at the Sanam Luang rally, September 19
Above: protest organiser Parit 'Penguin' Chiwarak

◀ political scientist at Chulalongkorn University, tells me. “The students at minimum succeeded in making the monarchy a policy issue for discussion and debate.” Under Bhumibol, he adds, “this would not have happened”.

The students have taken pains to keep the protests peaceful, another departure from past Thai political unrest that claimed lives. But they remain unrepentant in targeting the king, as well as a government they see as doing its master’s bidding.

“If a dog in a nearby house annoys you because it keeps barking, would you go out and fight the dog and tell it to stop barking?” protest organiser Parit “Penguin” Chiwarak asked me. “Or would you go out and talk to the owner of the dog to make it stop barking?”

Penguin’s formative moment in activism – and his first brush with police – came in 2018. Dressed as a worker, he approached then-military junta leader Prayuth at a May Day event, gave him a polite clasped-hands *wai* greeting, and said: “Please resign.” Police dragged him away and kept him for several hours.

Most of the protest leaders are in their teens and twenties (Penguin is 22), female and/or LGBT+, a departure for an arch-conservative society controlled comfortably – or so it seemed until recently – by old men. Schoolchildren, including a group called Bad Students, have joined protests and scandalised adults by raising three fingers at school.

“I love this country despite the fact that there are so many things that suck,” Penguin tells me in a café on Thammasat’s campus, where he speaks of Thailand’s history, which he loves to riff on, its temples, its palaces and its food. “It’s still my home.”

He remembers studying the French revolution in grade 10, aged about 16, and being captivated by the motto *Liberté, égalité, fraternité*. He also clashed with a teacher who was extolling the “sufficiency economy”, a rural development scheme championed by Bhumibol. “Being an agrarian country that produces raw materials, you get oppressed,” he told her. The teacher told him he had a “rotten heart”.

After Vajiralongkorn took the throne, monuments and plaques commemorating the events of 1932 began to disappear, which progressive Thais took as a sign their country was tipping back toward absolutism. The economy, after booming in the 1980s and 1990s, grew at one of the slowest rates in south-east Asia, thanks in part to its underperforming schools, which have a better record of enforcing haircut rules than excelling on tests.

Thais vented freely about this at home and online with their peers elsewhere in Asia. “This generation grew up with parents who were a lot more liberal,” says Kanokrat Lertchoosakul, a Chulalongkorn University assistant professor who has surveyed more than 150 young people involved in the protests. “Debate within the family is very widespread.”

Although Vajiralongkorn assented to an election last year, it was held under a constitution that weakened opposition parties and paved the way for Prayuth to install himself as prime minister. Ahead of the vote, he vetoed a run for office by his oldest sister, Ubolratana Rajakanya. On the eve of the election, the king urged Thais to “support good people” – widely understood as an intervention by an ostensibly apolitical sovereign against pro-democracy parties.

‘I felt I could no longer be on the sidelines. I had to be in the game’

Tattep ‘Ford’ Ruangprapaikitseree, student activist



Despite this, Future Forward, a party promising to eject the military from politics and build a more modern Thailand, still managed to come in third, thanks to support from many of the seven million eligible first-time voters. But the regime mounted a raft of legal cases against the party and in February a court dissolved it, angering the young Thais who had voted for it.

Among them were two student activists, Tattep “Ford” Ruangprapaikitseree and his boyfriend Panumas “James” Singprom, who joined in flash-mob protests that began late last year in support of Future Forward. They also formed Free Youth with a third friend, holding their first meeting at a McDonald’s near Thammasat’s suburban Rangsit campus. “I wanted to make young people understand what was going on and what the problems in Thailand are: first, capitalism; second, feudalism; third, all the generals,” Ford says.



Coronation of King Maha Vajiralongkorn, May 2019

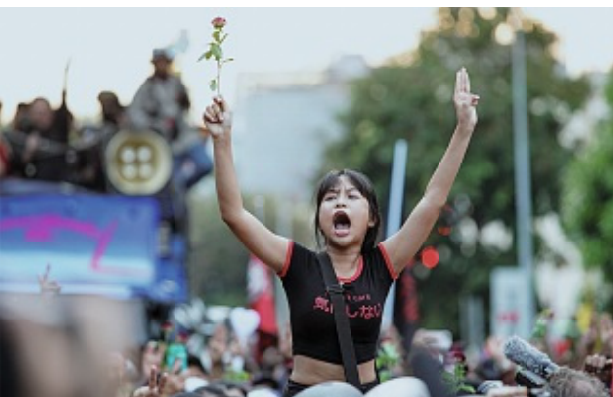
Ford grew up with parents who struggled to get by selling clothing and essentials. As a first-year politics student on scholarship at Chulalongkorn, he was part of a group that invited Hong Kong activist Joshua Wong to give a talk, only for Thailand to refuse Wong’s entry at China’s request. “I felt I could no longer be on the sidelines,” he said. “I had to be in the game.”

By the middle of the year, Free Youth set three demands: Prayuth’s resignation, the writing of a new constitution and an end to the harassment of dissenters. Their goal, student union leader Ua told me, was to make Thailand a “fully democratic country”.

Thailand’s young people were further shocked and angered by the disappearance in June of Wanchalearm Satsaksit, a Thai human rights and LGBT+ activist and a critic of the military regime, who was bundled into a car by unknown men in Cambodia and has not been seen since. #savewanchalearm began to circulate on Twitter. Pro-democracy activists in Hong Kong and Taiwan including Wong cheered them on.

Free Youth held their first big event on July 18 at Bangkok’s Democracy Monument, which commemorates the 1932 uprising. It attracted about 2,500 people and, over the next few weeks, the crowds kept growing. Ua, a third-year Thammasat student who aspires to be a politician, helped organise the event’s stage, security and logistics amid threats that the police would shut the protest down. “When we were growing up, we saw

Left: Tattep 'Ford' Ruangprapaikitseree and Panumas 'James' Singprom, in Nonthaburi Below: protesters marching on October 14 and (bottom) police at protests on October 21



'From being a taboo subject, the monarchy is now front and centre'

Thitinan Pongsudhirak, political scientist

things like the kidnapping of people who spoke out against the government," she tells me soon after. "My goal is to make the country fully democratic and try to support other things like human rights."

Elsewhere, a still more radical vision of confronting royal power directly was incubating. Arnon, a veteran human-rights lawyer who, at 36, is older than most other protest leaders, first broke the taboo on criticising the king at a small rally in Bangkok on August 3, when he compared him to the Harry Potter villain Voldemort. "Nobody actually dares mention Voldemort, despite the fact that he's behind all the evil things going on," Arnon told me in August. When I interviewed him, he was coming from court, where he is helping the defence in a long-running *lèse-majesté* case against a man who "insulted" Bhumibol's dog.

A week later, ahead of a rally at Rangsit, Penguin and another student, taking inspiration from the

Revolution party, a student union group where discussion of politics and the monarchy was frank. "I don't know how far this is going to go, how many years, but in the end this movement will succeed," Rung said in August. "The monarchy is too old to function in this world."

Soon after the Rangsit rally, Prayuth warned the students not to "touch" the monarchy, setting the regime's red line, which remains in place. His government also sent takedown requests to Facebook, Twitter and Google, asking them to block posts deemed anti-monarchy within Thailand. Facebook geo-blocked the Royalist Marketplace, an online news, gossip and comment site curated by Japan-based dissident Pavin Chachavalongpong. Within a day, he had moved it to a new location and more than two million people have now signed up to read it.

LGBT+ youth were early and enthusiastic supporters of the rallies. Many Thais show grudging, bemused tolerance toward queer people, but the country does not give them full equal marriage, adoption or inheritance rights or the right to change gender on documents.

"Being LGBTQ you won't get killed, you won't get physically attacked or face hate crimes, but you don't have an identity," says Penguin, who is gay. "It's a social class. If you are transgender, it's your duty to be a clown."

Despite the success of their rallies, the students were bickering. Some of the Free Youth leaders told me they thought the movement should remain focused on ousting Prayuth rather than targeting the king. They said the 10 demands amounted to putting the cart before the horse, and that students should instead push for a democratic constitution, then allow a new parliament to start tackling royal reforms.

Separately, Penguin, Arnon and some of the other male leaders were coming under criticism from female activists for remarks they deemed sexist or insensitive, including Penguin's response to a sexual assault allegation involving a Dome Revolution member at Thammasat.

Meanwhile the protests continued to swell in size, reaching their peak at Sanam Luang the night before the People's Plaque was laid, when tens of thousands attended. (Thai police do not provide official estimates.)

Arnon tells me this was evidence that the calls for reforming "the institution", as Thais dub the monarchy, had traction. "On September 19 they knew the Thammasat group were organising the protest and would definitely talk about the monarchy, and they still came," he says.

Authorities began piling criminal charges on the students, including sedition, apparently meting out the harshest treatment to the Thammasat group. Some turned their arrests into online events. Ua livestreamed hers on Facebook, wearing a black "FUCK PRAYUTH" T-shirt and reading aloud from 18th-century US revolutionary Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* as she was arrested. Ford and James did a livestream from the back of a police car, speaking about politics and inequality as they drove through Bangkok. "It was as if we were lecturing police at the same time," James recalls.

But the students' demands were also expanding the acceptable parameters of public debate. Thai media are now reporting openly on their programme, including the 10 demands (though they mostly still avoid mentioning the king's residence ►

writings of Somsak Jeamteerasakul, an academic who fled to Paris after the 2014 coup, drafted the 10 demands for reforming the monarchy at a student office on campus.

In a Thai context, these were extraordinary: in addition to revoking *lèse-majesté*, the proposals called for cutting the palace's budget, separating the king's personal assets from the CPB's, and ending education that "excessively and one-sidedly glorifies the monarchy". They also stated: "The king must not endorse any coups."

"That's harsh!" Rung told Penguin when she saw it. But she volunteered to read the demands out before a crowd of 10,000 at the rally. Backlit and wearing a red blouse, she threw the pages up in the air when she was done.

If leftwing Thais consider Rung a heroine, she is the accidental kind. The daughter of a middle-class family, she says she studied sociology because she did not have good enough grades to read political science. At Thammasat, she gravitated to the Dome

◀ in Germany). Future Forward, now renamed Move Forward, used its seats on parliament's budget committee to probe ballooning public spending on the royals, budgeted at 9bn baht (£224m) this year, including a fleet of 38 aircraft earmarked for royal family use.

The People's Plaque was removed by police the night after Rung, Penguin and the others posed with their hands on it. But it has since resurfaced in 3D printed replicas, T-shirts, face masks and even cookies. Thanathorn Juangroongruangkit, Future Forward's former leader, says the students have done Thailand a service by addressing the monarchy, which he calls the "elephant in the room". "No one wanted to be the first one to say it, to mention the elephant," he says. "They are brave."

Just after 5pm on October 14, a motorcade bearing Queen Suthida and Prince Dipangkorn, the potential heir to the throne, glided by Government House en route to present offerings at two temples. Pro-democracy protesters were gathered at the site ahead of a major rally.

As the Queen's cream-coloured Rolls-Royce passed, according to camera footage, several raised the three-finger salute. Some chanted "*pasii gu*" - "my taxes" or, given the crude variant of the word "*I*" they used, "my fucking taxes".

The Queen, a former Thai Airways flight attendant who holds the rank of general, came to no physical harm. But early the next day, Prayuth announced an emergency decree outlawing meetings of five or more people, and police dispersed protesters camped around Government House. The tactics were familiar, but what struck many Thais was a principal justification the prime minister used for the crackdown - "an action that had an impact on the royal motorcade".

Police charged three people under Section 110 of the criminal code - "Violence to the Queen's Liberty" - a crime so rarely tried that many Thais had not heard of it. Dozens of people, including Penguin and Rung, were arrested. Conspiracy theorists speculated the royal Rolls had been intentionally routed near the protesters to provoke confrontation and justify the crackdown.

But the emergency decree backfired. Protesters, learning from Hong Kong, began staging flash demonstrations on a daily basis, organised at short notice to circumvent police blockades or Bangkok transit shutdowns. Student leaders used code to tell protesters where to go: "Let's get a new iPad" was a call to meet at Bangkok's Ratchaprasong intersection, which has an Apple store. "Let's go pray" meant gather near the Erawan Buddhist shrine. When Ford said he was going to "eat meatballs" one recent evening, it was code that a big protest was about to kick off (the protests are major magnets for food hawkers).

While protesters no longer had the stages, prepared speeches or photo opps of rallies like the ones at Sanam Luang, some brought amplifiers and people spoke spontaneously from the crowd. After police fired water cannons at a demonstration on October 16, protesters began wearing hard hats and using umbrellas to shield themselves.

If protesters were divided before on when or whether to criticise the king, the crackdown unified many. Chants insulting or attacking "*Oh*" ("royal son") began to be heard, alongside the usual ones taunting "*Tu*" (Prayuth's nickname).



'My goal is to make the country fully democratic and try to support other things like human rights'

Jutatip 'Ua' Sirikhan, leader of the Thai Students' Union

Prayuth lifted the emergency order a week after it was imposed. One theory is he did so to allow counter-protests by royalist "yellow shirts", who have made their presence known more in recent days. Rumours of a violent crackdown on the pro-democracy youth spread, with protection of the monarchy used as a pretext.

The fears, though entirely speculative, are not unfounded. In 1976, an imagined threat against then-Crown Prince Vajiralongkorn was used as justification for the gruesome slaughter of at least 46 people protesting on Thammasat's campus against the return to Thailand of ex-military dictator Thanom Kittikachorn.

At least nine Thais in exile who criticised the monarchy or the military have disappeared since the 2014 coup. These included two activists who disappeared in Laos in December 2018 and whose bodies were later found on the Thai side of the Mekong river, handcuffed, disembowelled and stuffed with concrete.

The increasingly threadbare myth that the king sits above politics was punctured on October 24, when Vajiralongkorn and Suthida met and praised Thitiwat Tanagaroon, a royalist counter-protester at one of the youth rallies. "Very brave, very good, thank you," said the king, as he and Suthida greeted well-wishers outside the Grand Palace. His remarks were shared widely online, stirring anger among progressive Thais, who took them as clear evidence their sovereign was taking sides.

Within a few days, the students on the streets had turned the king's words into a taunting meme. On October 26, I watched as thousands of people gathered in Bangkok to march to the German embassy to confront Berlin, and the Thai public, with the fact that their king lives abroad.

A trans woman led cheers of "Very brave! Very good! Thank you!" punctuating each phrase with

claps as a girl nearby did expressive arm gestures and people laughed. Protesters carried signs saying "*Sehr mutig, sehr gut. Danke!*" (the king's words in German) and "*Papa, komm bitte nach Hause*" (Daddy, please come home). "This gathering has no leader," a male protester on a truck told the crowd through a megaphone. "If anyone wants to talk about any issue, come forward!" The crowd chanted: "Everybody is a leader!"

When I began reporting this story in September, the students told me they expected to be arrested, but that new leaders would rise in their place. Rung told me she was prepared to die if need be.

By the time I finished, Rung, Penguin and Arnon were facing multiple criminal charges and prison time. The leaders who were still free were taking a more behind-the-scenes role, allowing speakers to step up as they wished. The student leaders, once split over whether and when to press for monarchy reforms, are now unified in demanding them.

The unrest is drawing more international attention than before - and it too is focusing on the king. In Germany's Bundestag, foreign minister Heiko Maas said he was "keeping an eye on the activities of the Thai king while in Germany" and made it clear that Berlin did not want him conducting affairs of state while there. Questions about the king have begun to recur regularly at government press conferences in Berlin.

The US, Thailand's main military ally, has urged peaceful protest and dialogue and debunked an online rumour that Washington was supporting the protests, but has mostly stayed silent. So has Japan, Thailand's biggest foreign investor.

Rumours of a coup, which surface perennially in Bangkok, have grown acute in recent days, as have unconfirmed reports of back-channel talks between government and protesters. Yellow-shirt counter-protesters have begun to make their views known online and in person, accusing students of being "nation-haters". Prayuth broached constitutional reform at a recent extraordinary session of parliament, but MPs spent much of the session vilifying the protesters. He also recently made a reference to "foreign interference" in Thailand, though he did not say by which country.

If the students have any reason to hope they might succeed where Hong Kong's protesters failed, political scientist Thitinan points out, it is that Thailand does not have an outside power like China poised to crush them. And, say observers, given that some of the most fearless protesters have been teenagers, a new generation of dissenters is on the way. "The real change will come in the next two to three years, when these high-school kids enter university," says Kanokrat, the Chulalongkorn researcher.

Meanwhile, the protest carnival rolls on. Outside the German embassy last week, where several thousand people gathered, youths commandeered a police truck to display T-shirts emblazoned with the People's Plaque and the three-finger salute. As always, food vendors (who some Thais jokingly call the CIA because of their uncanny foreknowledge of protest sites) were there, selling sugar-cane juice and sausages. A quartet of drag queens danced in formation and people chanted "Prayuth, bastard". The protest broke up by 10pm and the crowd dispersed in preparation for the next day. **FT**

John Reed is the FT's Bangkok bureau chief.
Additional reporting by Ryn Jirenuwat



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Read my lips

Sarah Cooper's viral videos of her mouthing Donald Trump's words have tapped into the subversive power of the lip-sync, a mainstay of queer satire for decades, writes Josh Spero

It's Donald Trump's voice in the video, giving impromptu medical advice on how to fight coronavirus, but it's definitely not Trump's face. "And then I see the disinfectant, where it knocks it out in a minute, one minute" - mouths comedian Sarah Cooper as she quizzically examines a bottle of kitchen cleaner - "and is there a way we can do something like that by injection inside" - she aims the nozzle at a vein in her arm - "or almost a cleaning?"

Trump's suggestion came at an April 24 press conference, and later that day Cooper uploaded her lip-sync of his words to short-video app TikTok. Dressed in a smart blue suit jacket, she largely plays Trump straight, which makes his hazy science and her split-second slips into absurdity all the funnier.

As of late October, the video had been viewed more than 23 million times. This wasn't Cooper's first Trump lip-sync - in earlier ones, her timing could be scrappy - but now she has refined the act, combining old-fashioned comedy tricks with new technology.

Cooper has tapped into the power of the lip-sync, a mainstay of queer entertainment and satire for decades, updating it for audiences who have likely never realised the striking effect that soundlessly repeating someone else's words could have. Over the past 40 years, the lip-sync has made it from small rooms in dark clubs to the bright lights of TV shows such as *RuPaul's Drag Race* and *Lip Sync Battle* - and now the brutal glare of global politics.

As a small child in a small Mississippi city 60 odd years ago, John Epperson liked it when his sisters lip-synced to a record their father owned - *For Men Only*, a collection of slinky 1950s standards with Jayne Mansfield on the sleeve - and he liked to mimic them. But the next time he saw lip-syncing, he liked it a lot less.

In 1973, in a gay bar in Jackson, Mississippi, Epperson, who was then a college student,

watched a drag troupe from Memphis who lip-synced. "It scared me," he says, speaking from New York. "At the time I didn't know why, but now as I look back I was scared because I was looking at myself."

Epperson came to appreciate the absurd and performative aspects of the lip-sync as a theatre student. "I started to think you can call this art if you want to," he says, just "not in Jackson, Mississippi - you got to get to New York to call this art." He did get to New York, and Paris too, where he watched a drag cabaret in which his waiter performed on stage as Liza Minnelli.

All of this, plus movies from Hollywood's golden age, helped Epperson come up with his character, Lypsinka, who became lip-syncing's first breakout star, appearing on TV and off-Broadway. At first, his act was "primitive," he says - he recorded songs on to a cassette tape - but early computer programs allowed him to cut and paste audio clips, so he could put music on one track, spoken word on another and "do thematically more complicated stuff". In one performance, available on YouTube, Lypsinka, dressed in a ballgown, delivers lines from Hollywood heroines in various states of high emotion, each one cut off by a ringing telephone. The comedy and the drama come from how seriously Lypsinka inhabits each character.

So did Epperson intend this to be a satire on Hollywood, gender and stardom? "My original aim was just to be adored, unfortunately," he says. "It didn't occur to me that I could have other intentions until later on."

But audience members did see the satire - a trans woman praised his "very political" show and when he said he didn't intend it to be, she said, "Well you may not have - and I understand that - but it is."

Today Epperson embraces the politics of lip-syncing, how it takes apart received ideas about gender and class. "I'll say to everyone who's thinking about lip-syncing: be subversive!"

'At a bar in Tokyo, I saw a drag queen insert Greta Thunberg's "How dare you" speech into her Doris Day lip-sync'

When John Epperson said he was scared

because he saw himself in a drag queen, I knew what he meant. In 2017, a friend showed me a clip from *RuPaul's Drag Race*, where drag queens compete in a variety of challenges - whipping up drag on a dime, performing hectic choreography - before facing off in a lip-sync.

In the video, two of the contestants - one in biker-chic black plastique, the other in a demure red dress with long gloves and a long wavy wig - spin and stalk about the stage as "So Emotional" by Whitney Houston plays. Although they are only mouthing the words, they're also acting in face and body - and they are astonishing. The one in the dress, Sasha Velour, pulls off her gloves and rose petals fly out across the stage, and as the song hits the chorus - "I get so emotional, baaaby" - she lifts off her wig and a shower of rose petals floats down. The audience gets to its feet and screams.

That performance, I tell Velour on a phone call, unhinged me. I glimpsed a world beyond the tight rules of gender I had bound myself by and the freedom frightened me. It became a joyous exploration, eventually, but the power of that lip-sync still makes me shiver. Velour, who is gender-fluid, gets it: lip-syncing, she says, is about "the esoteric shifting between genders that's possible when you realise that the binary premise [of male and female] is not real". The art form helps make fantasy true.

Politics is certainly more overt in lip-syncing now than it was in Epperson's heyday of the 1980s. One evening this year, at a bar in Tokyo, I saw a drag queen insert environmental campaigner Greta Thunberg's "How dare you" speech into her lip-sync performance of Doris Day's "Qué Será, Será". Velour cites a number of her peers for their political work - Bob The Drag Queen, in a skintight fishtail lemon dress, mashing up *Les Misérables* and Martin Luther King Jr, and Panti Bliss, Marti Gould Cummings and Junior Mintt, "who are taking drag out of



Illustrations by Priya Sundram

Continued on page 41

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State of mind

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One foot in front of the other

Helen Barrett discovers that taking to the streets in city centres and suburbs can be a freeing experience.
Photographs by **Alice Zoo**



These pages and next:
views along the King
John's Walk section of the
Capital Ring Walk around
the outskirts of London

Walking is liberation, wrote Frédéric Gros in his book *A Philosophy of Walking*, a manifesto for a non-sedentary life. He is right, of course, but there is a problem: more than half

the world's population lives in cities. How do you liberate yourself in the middle of a pandemic when you are nowhere near the countryside?

Like many Londoners escaping screen fatigue, I took to urban walking this year. Plunging into the open air and pounding pavements day after day became a way to alleviate wanderlust and get "right in the middle of the world", as Gros describes it. I was grieving after my mother's death in the early months of the pandemic - a particular kind of isolation - so while south London may not be as beguiling as the Swiss Alps (Nietzsche's favoured walking destination, according to Gros), I followed his advice.

Gros was right: walking felt freeing, whether I was alone or with others, even in one of the most densely populated cities on earth. And science backs me up.

"Studies have supported this, and it is quite profound evidence," says Sam Cooley, a psychologist who has researched the benefits of urban walking. "It increases the blood flow to the brain, which has all kinds of positive impacts on cognition: creativity, problem-solving, emotional release. Walking can help with mood, and it can help people to open up, feel freer to share things."

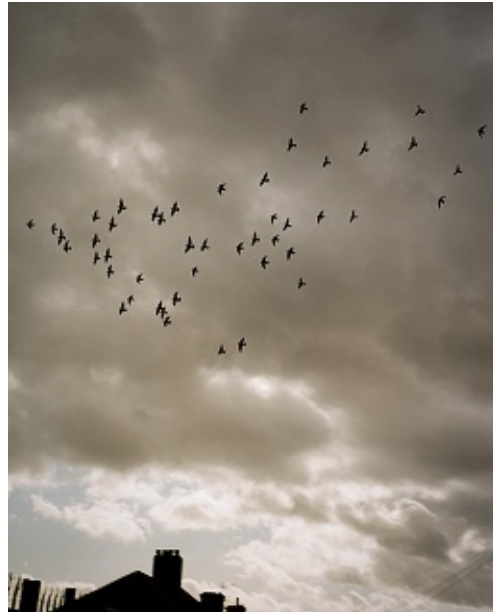
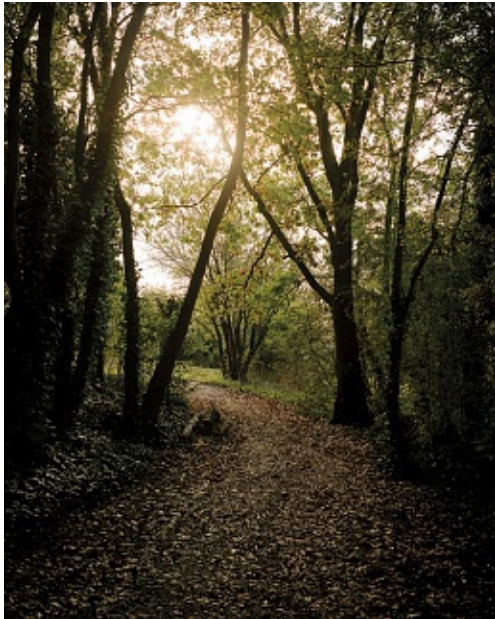
We tend to associate walking and vigorous health with the countryside, but Cooley says the city can be just as invigorating: "A lot of it is irrespective of location - these are physiological changes through movement."

In a paper to be published soon in the journal *Ecopsychology*, Cooley and his colleagues studied a walking group set up by occupational therapists for people with mental-health conditions in Leicester. Over a year, the researchers set out to discover whether the group benefited as much from walking in the city as they did on rural rambles.

"My hypothesis was the greener walks would have a greater [positive] impact," says Cooley, who based his assumption on "attention restoration theory" - the idea that mental fatigue and concentration can be improved by spending time in the natural world. "But the findings were surprising. It was not as black and white as that."

Cooley found that city excursions were just as good as rural walks, with different benefits depending on who was doing the walking. Those who had been lonely said their lives were better, regardless of where they walked. "There were profound improvements in mental health, reduction of anxiety and increasing confidence," says Cooley. "People who were not engaging in society went from that to voluntary work and paid jobs."

Urban walking is more than just a poor substitute for country expeditions. Deep in grief, I found pleasure in excursions to parts of London I first visited as a child with my mother, which she (one of the most enthusiastic urban walkers I have known) had loved and which she had taught me how to look at and understand. Even in deserted streets, I found reassurance in discovering Richard Rogers' Lloyd's of London building still looming over Lime Street. The Barbican, though largely empty, was as solid and as indefatigable as ever. ►



‘Walking has all kinds of positive impacts on cognition: creativity, problem-solving, emotional release’

Sam Cooley, psychologist

◀ And while walking alone was fun, walking with friends was the greatest pleasure of all. Conversation came easily, the sense of forward motion somehow releasing inhibition.

I was, of course, immersing myself in the past, which is not necessarily a bad thing when faced with bereavement or an existential threat such as a pandemic, says Nick Summerton, a GP and adviser to the Ramblers, a walking charity.

He recommends seeking comfort in urban Roman remains like those at the Barbican, or woven into the fabric of cities such as Chester and York: “The Romans went through the Antonine plague [AD165-180]. When you are at these sites, you can reflect on the fact that previous civilisations lived through this – and they got through it.” (Summerton points out that print sales of *Meditations*, Marcus Aurelius’s Stoic text written at that time, were up nearly 30 per cent in the early months of 2020.)

Another tip, he says, is to raise your gaze, as advised 40 years ago by the architectural historian and tireless urban walker Alec Clifton-Taylor in his classic television series *Six English Towns*. If walkers look up to the tops of buildings and appreciate the whole, he thought they were more likely to experience joy than if they hasten along with eyes fixed at street level.

This advice is repeated in the recent fad for “awe walks”, which followed a study this year by researchers at the University of California, San Francisco. It found that people who encounter “physical vastness” and “novelty” while walking, such as historic

monuments or important buildings, experience a shift in their perception of their place in the world. “The idea is that certain sorts of walks are good for spirits. Awe is about having something splendid as part of your walk,” says Summerton.

But historic monuments and important buildings tend to be in city centres. What if you are stranded in suburbia and need a quick fix?

As well as excursions to the City, I often found myself striding along the Capital Ring Walk in the summer. This is a complete circular route around the outskirts of London, marked only with signposts, and I became intimate with a stretch between Streatham in the south and Eltham in the south-east – a string of playing fields, A-roads, golf courses, industrial estates and allotments, mostly linked together by 20th-century housing estates.

Admittedly, it was not always awesome. But I did find King John’s Walk, which runs from Eltham Palace to Mottingham, an ancient and peaceful right of way that was originally a route for royalty to reach hunting estates. To one side was a vast panorama of the capital, far more expansive than that from Parliament Hill in north-west London and utterly silent, from which I enjoyed trying to make out both the Lloyd’s building and the Barbican.

Is it possible to enhance a walk for mental health? Yes, says Cooley, who suggests a technique

called 5-4-3-2-1, which helps stop mental chatter and churn from stealing the benefits. As you are walking, notice five things that you see, feel four things (perhaps the wind on your face), listen to three sounds, take in two scents and one taste. “It’s a very quick exercise to help engage the senses with the world around us,” he says. “If our lives are chaotic, we may find we come back from a walk and realise we were so caught up in stress that all we have done is gone from A to B... Try to engage the senses, and use [5-4-3-2-1] if you need it, particularly if your thoughts are very inward. It offers a technique for escape.”

Summerton says one of the best ways to reap benefits is to pick up the pace. “We know that if people walk faster, they do better in terms of health. We tell them that the grim reaper walks at about two miles per hour. If you can walk faster, he’s less likely to catch up with you.”

But perhaps walking’s greatest benefit – and greatest relief – is its simplicity.

This year, we city-dwellers often used lockdown to improve ourselves, frantically learning languages or building muscle, seemingly unable to live with an absence of achievement. Walking is the opposite of all that. No one wins, no one becomes better at it (unless they are recovering physical strength) and there is no pressure to do anything more complicated than put one foot in front of another. Walking is the greatest of urban escapes. **FT**

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Helen Barrett is deputy editor of *FT Wealth* magazine



COMMITTED TO YOUR
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PROTECTING MENTAL HEALTH IN A POST-COVID WORLD



When the dotcom bubble burst two decades ago, psychologists began hearing from financial firms worried about staff experiencing extreme stress as they dealt with clients losing vast sums of money. In addition, and often for the first time, high-net-worth individuals began seeking support as they struggled to cope with a period of significant financial uncertainty.

The dotcom crash made people realise that there was a profound need to bring a mental wellbeing focus to the financial world. And, thanks to this shift, it's now recognised that money is an emotional issue, rather than just a rational one.

So, with all this experience high-net-worth individuals and employers should be better prepared for the pandemic, economic volatility and political turmoil which has blighted the world this year. However, that's not entirely the case. There are significant challenges remaining - some of which are brought about by differences between the situation in 2020 and anything we've seen before.

For example, unlike the dotcom crash, the COVID-19 pandemic has seen people spending more time than ever at home, giving them time to assess their priorities. Indeed, the Bupa Global Executive

Wellbeing Index¹ shows that, as a result of lockdown, a third (33 per cent) of executives now want to spend more time with their families. And so, as individuals return to an office-based world, thought must be given to how they can maintain a good work-life balance and protect that precious family time.

Furthermore, today, people are not just concerned with their own mental health but that of their families too. Indeed, Bupa Global's research revealed that 68% per cent of high-net-worth individuals have seen an impact on family mental health during the pandemic and want to address the problems which have arisen.

Talking openly and seeking support early

So, while the issues are perhaps different this time around, for Bupa Global, many of the solutions remain constant. Just as in the year 2000, in order to protect mental health and ensure that treatment is effective, individuals, families and employers must be committed to talking openly about concerns, and to seeking help early.

Dr Pablo Vandenabeele, Clinical Director for mental health at Bupa Global says: "Stigmas and uncertainty around mental health conditions can lead to delays. At Bupa Global we want to raise awareness for common conditions and help people get the support they need, when they need it. Indeed, when it comes to mental health, early diagnosis and access to treatment can have a positive impact on the long-term prognosis."

At Bupa Global, we recognise that mental health is just as important as physical health and believe in helping people to feel their best and stay that way too. To support this, we are removing both annual and monetary limits across plans for in-patient and day-patient mental health treatment. We know that when a family member is struggling with their mental health, it can impact the whole family - that's why we offer extensive mental health cover for individuals and their families.

For more information, visit bupaglobal.com/withyou or call **0371 346 0117**.

¹ Bupa Global Executive Wellbeing Index (September 2020). Research conducted among 450 high net worth individuals and senior executives across UK, France, USA, UAE and Egypt.

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One thing I don't miss about the many years I spent combining office work with bringing up small children is all the sweat. By that, I mean actual anxiety sweat running down my back while crammed into a London Tube train. I was on a deadline to collect the children from nursery, but always left work too late. Why? Guilt. Everyone else was still at their desks when I snuck out – and we all knew I was a terrible employee.

After spending time with the kids, I'd check my BlackBerry, often working late into the night or on my notional days off.

In fact, what I was doing was flexible working – adjusting my work schedule to fit around my life, rather than being shoehorned into conventional office timings. What was then an unusual working pattern would now be recognised as valid – and, one hopes, would be paid to reflect the many extra hours I spent working at home. But the term and concept were popularised only 20 years ago, not long before I was running for those trains.

In the years before the pandemic, more employers had started to free people to work truly flexibly. The definition of flexible working includes (but is not limited to) shorter, compressed days, term-time working, job sharing or just making work “asynchronous” – meaning employees have the freedom to tackle their workload in their own time, not following someone else's schedule.

I'd argue that now, more than ever, workplaces and managers need to nurture, embed and extend flexible working patterns, for the good of us all, as we head into an uncertain future. It might sound counter-intuitive to talk about the importance of working less, or at different times, just as many companies are making redundancies and doubling down on workload and productivity demands. But if we want to avoid burnout, dropout and the coming blizzard of mental-health problems, that's exactly where we need to shift our corporate culture.

We already know that employees have worked more during the pandemic: the average working day has lengthened by 48 minutes, according to a global survey of more than three million workers by the US National Bureau of Economic Research. So how do we stop the cycle? Some companies have already moved to a four-day week. Shorter hours are good for people and productivity. But even where that's not possible, working from home has given many



Flex appeal

The pandemic has made it more important than ever for employers to embed and extend flexible working patterns, argues *Isabel Berwick*

‘I can say now what I didn't say to my managers years ago: flexible work creates space to breathe’

of us the tools to navigate new and helpful ways of flexible working.

A new campaign called #Flexible-First from WACL, which represents senior women in the advertising and communications industries, is calling for employers to be proactive in offering flexible working. This might be the key to preventing women's advancement at work being set back decades: according to McKinsey research, one in four women in the US is considering “downshifting” her career or leaving the workforce because of the effects of the pandemic on daily life, especially the extra burdens of childcare.

But other benefits of flexible working are less obvious, given employers and managers can never know what is going on in a person's interior life – unless they tell them. And I certainly didn't tell. I can say now what I didn't then: flexible work creates space to breathe. In my case, to go for walks, see friends – and allow professionals to help me manage the anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder that persisted for years after a child's near-fatal illness.

That was back when the world was not askew. How many millions of people in 2020 are going through far more difficult times?

The final, and perhaps biggest, wellbeing benefit of flexible working

has suddenly become visible in lockdown. Many people have become grounded in their area – perhaps for the first time, after years or decades of rushing between home and office. Keeping some flexibility in our working hours in future will give everyone extra time to build the ties of community. Feeling that we are part of something bigger than ourselves and having time to help others are key components of mental health. (The work of economist Richard Layard is especially good in this area.)

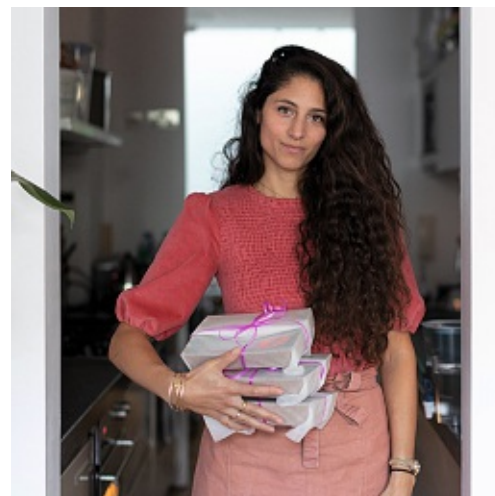
Like most parents, I spent hours watching sport lessons, helping with school fundraising and the church jumble sale – or just sitting in the soft play centre café, eating cake with other locals. Cumulatively, these are the hours that bind us into our communities with both strong ties of close friendship and, also important, weak ties – those friends of friends and kind people from “around”.

I work full time now. I am a manager, I rarely finish work before 7pm – and my children are young adults. But I still see the same people, some now good friends, 20 years after first pushing a pram around the neighbourhood. Flexible working works – and its benefits last a lifetime. **FT**

Isabel Berwick is the FT's Work & Careers editor

Illustration by Sarah Fabre

From left: Niamh Wimperis with kits for her business, #WEStitchKit; an embroidery pattern sent out to her subscribers; Micaela Philippo with orders for her food delivery service, Sunday Goodies; cookies Philippo sold at a charity bake sale; Tom King and Miranda Essex of PlantEra; the company sold plants rescued from growers during lockdown



When one door closes

Hit by furloughs, job losses and salary cuts, resourceful young people have turned the uncertainty of the pandemic into an opportunity to start side hustles. Amy O'Brien reports

When Niamh Wimperis moved to London two years ago, after completing a masters in embroidery, there was no way her needlework commissions were going to pay the rent. She found full-time work as a receptionist and tried to keep up embroidery when she found the time.

Things changed in March when she was furloughed. "I started getting really awful panic attacks after being at home for a month," says the 29-year-old. "I soon realised it wasn't furlough but the prospect of getting back on the Tube and sitting behind a desk every day that brought them on."

Wimperis used her new-found time to set up a subscription service called #WEStitchKit, sending out a box each month that includes thread, embroidery equipment, a pattern and instructions. In July, when her employer said it could not afford her any more, it did not matter - Wimperis's business had already tripled her salary.

People aged 18-29 have been disproportionately affected by furlough, job losses and salary cuts in the pandemic, according to the Resolution Foundation think-tank. But for some, such as Wimperis, it has been a blessing in disguise: "It got me out of the work-eat-bed routine and gave me the time to figure out how to monetise what makes me happy."

The Resolution Foundation also found that young people were more likely to work in irregular or insecure jobs, concentrated in "shutdown sectors" such as hospitality and retail. For Micaela Philippo, who was a brand director for a restaurant group, work went from all to nothing. "The stability that was supposed to be provided by work fell from beneath my feet," she says.

Restless, Philippo turned to creativity in the kitchen, making and delivering baked goods to

'The fear of launching my own business was always about money. But when the financial security of employment went, I had nothing to lose'

Micaela Philippo, Sunday Goodies



friends as a way to connect on doorsteps. They soon pointed out she should charge for them – and so her food delivery service Sunday Goodies was born. “The fear of launching my own business was always about money,” she says. “But when the financial security of employment went, I had nothing to lose – and for me there is no better therapy than making something people can enjoy.”

Precarious employment and the accompanying financial uncertainty have taken a huge toll on young people’s mental health since March. A study by University College London found that those aged between 18 and 29 have experienced much higher levels of anxiety than any other age group during the pandemic. “The textbook definition of anxiety is an intolerance of uncertainty – and there’s no kind of certainty for young people at the moment,” says psychotherapist Owen O’Kane.

In times of extreme uncertainty, focusing on the future and developing a project in the present can be much more effective than choosing to “wait and see”, says Ute Stephan, professor of entrepreneurship at King’s College London: “Entrepreneurship is a way of taking charge of your life.”

In a recent survey, Stephan and her colleagues found that 44 per cent of entrepreneurs volunteered their business services for good causes during the pandemic. “Particularly during a crisis, we get more satisfaction out of helping others,” she says. “When all this uncertainty makes us feel threatened, we crave a connection with other people to make us feel better – and one way of creating a community is through a project or business.”

This feeling motivated Molly Vincent and five friends to launch non-profit social enterprise DrawFor during lockdown. “Working in creative

industries, many of us had lost work but we wanted to make something positive out of a difficult time,” she says. They collaborated with 100 artists who donated affordable prints to their #DrawForNHS art sale in May. After raising £20,000 for the NHS, the friends decided to continue the project with two more campaigns and now pay 50 per cent of the revenue to the artists involved.

“I think the project saved me this year,” Vincent says. “I was really needing a sense of purpose – and now we’ve created a community for artists to connect and feel like they’re doing good too.”

Miranda Essex and Tom King identified an opportunity to help other businesses in March when they read that, because of garden centre closures across the UK, millions of plants were going to be thrown away. Worried about the environmental impact and growers’ incomes, they set up PlantEra, buying the plants wholesale from growers, then delivering them on the same day to subscribers in London. “Within the first month, we’d salvaged 30,000 plants that growers may have had to pay to destroy,” Essex says. As people spent more time at home, the urban gardening community grew so much that the pair joined a tech-for-good accelerator programme at Bethnal Green Ventures and plan to take the business full time. “At first it was all about the initial need to rescue plants during lockdown,” says Essex. “But now we can help more Londoners connect through nature – it’s made us feel useful.”

Suddenly without his day job at Mayfair’s smart Postcard Teas shop and with no restaurants to visit, food writer Jonathan Nunn couldn’t stop thinking about the chefs and writers he knew who were out of work. He floated the idea of a newsletter on an

industry group chat and within 48 hours he’d set up Vittles.

“I thought it shouldn’t just be about me writing, but opening up the food media space – for new writers or people who want to write something different from their normal commissions,” he says. Vittles has 11,000 subscribers and its subjects range from the decline of a Liverpudlian stew to the absence of black voices in the food industry. Nunn says he is not focused on making a profit, but wants to ensure he pays contributors fairly, which he does thanks to £2,000 of monthly donations on Patreon and a paid subscription option.

“During the pandemic, the UK food media seems to have become less adversarial,” Nunn says. “The community aspect of Vittles has been really important for me to feel like I’m a small part of that bigger movement. I think the pandemic was the impetus I needed to do what I’d otherwise have deliberated for a long time.”

While job opportunities for young people are scarce, Herminia Ibarra, organisational behaviour professor at London Business School, recommends focusing on long-term goals and side projects that bring enjoyment. “Taking active steps to get involved in these activities shifts you from the ‘I’m stuck’ mindset to a vision of your possible self,” she says. “It gets you in a process that is future-focused, moving towards something that is positive, which improves how you feel.”

For some, the pandemic could simply accelerate the fulfilment of long-held ambitions. “What I’m doing was a response to something that was completely out of my hands,” says Philippo, founder of Sunday Goodies. “It was the intuitive next step – it’s just come a lot sooner than expected.” **FT**





Coping with addiction

For many, the Covid-19 outbreak has intensified problems with alcohol and drugs. *Emma Jacobs* explores how the pandemic has affected those struggling and the new help that is available. Illustrations by *Sarah Fabre*

The construction site was not just Sam's workplace, it was also where he scored cocaine. "It's full of it, people selling drugs," he says. The 23-year-old knew his alcohol and cocaine abuse was "out of control" but he felt no urge to stop. Then the pandemic swept through the UK, the country locked down in March and he lost his job. With no work to go to, there was little reason to limit his drinking and drug-taking.

"I was bored at home," he says. "I'd be sneaky about it, would take the dogs for a walk to meet my dealer. I was probably taking [up] to two grammes a day." With no wages to fund his habit, he ran up debts and, in desperation, sought a bailout from his parents, who eventually kicked him out of the family home. Their "tough love" filled him with deep shame. "I wanted to kill myself," he says.

Sam is not the only one finding the pandemic has intensified his problems with addiction. In September, the Royal College of Psychiatrists, drawing on Public Health England figures, reported that 8.4 million people's drinking was "higher risk", up from 4.8 million in February. (PHE defines higher risk as those people scoring eight or more on a 10-question clinical questionnaire that assesses the dependency, amount and frequency of alcohol consumption.)

It is too early to tell the long-term impact of changing social restrictions on addictions but Alcoholics Anonymous says in the first quarter of this year, it dealt with 26,000 inquiries, compared with 19,000 the year before - followed by another 27,000 in the second quarter. The British Medical Journal has highlighted two groups in need of support - those already struggling with alcohol dependence and those on the brink: "For them, dependence will be triggered by bereavement, job insecurity or troubled relationships."

It is not just drink, as Sam's case shows. Analysis by the Royal College of Psychiatrists of data from the National Drug Treatment Monitoring System shows a 20 per cent increase in adults seeking help from addiction services in April 2020, at 3,500, compared with the previous year. Inquiries to the Priory, Britain's biggest private mental-healthcare provider, were 26 per cent higher than in September last year.

Pamela Roberts, psychotherapist and addictions programme manager at the Priory Hospital Woking, says: "Covid has accelerated a dependency that might have otherwise crept up on them over time. Social isolation, loss of control over the situation we find ourselves in, working from home, not connecting with support networks or structures - all are issues that contribute to drinking more."

Most of the patients seen by consultant psychiatrist Dr Niall Campbell, an addictions expert based at the Priory Hospital Roehampton in London, are working from home. "As time went on, the novelty wore off," he says, "and often relationships with partners and family members deteriorated, and people became stressed, or more bored, and began to drink earlier and the quantities they consumed increased... Some people became increasingly isolated, which is a feature of worsening alcohol abuse."

When it comes to drug abuse, Campbell observes that his clients have had no difficulty meeting dealers: "The street-drug supply system is extremely efficient and doesn't care about the law or social-distancing regulations. Dealers continue to deliver or ►



'It could have been the relief of being out again after lockdown. I thought I was in control. I wasn't really accepting of being an alcoholic'

◀ supply from their own homes as efficiently as they always did. From John O'Groats to Land's End, a deal is only a phone call away."

In some cases, people are bingeing less frequently as social restrictions curb their visits to pubs and bars; the time has given them opportunity to reflect on their drug and alcohol dependency and made them seek help. Proximity to family members over long periods makes problems harder to hide too – as Sam discovered.

This was not the case for Tom, who works in the tech sector and is based in Berkshire. Having previously experienced problems with alcohol and cocaine, he found lockdown a healthy experience: "I didn't drink... I'd been sober since February 2018." That he was spending huge amounts of time with his daughter at home also helped.

Then pubs reopened. "I wanted to be normal and fit in," he says. "It could have been the relief of being out again. I thought I was in control of the addiction. I wasn't really accepting of being an alcoholic. It progressively took over – from a binge to a bender of days of heavy drinking. I still hid it... It went to a level of insanity."

He became very ill: hot sweats and cold sweats, paranoia, shaking. "I wasn't at the hallucinating stage... It was restlessness. I couldn't sleep. You're scared, you feel desolate. I call it my 'infinite abyss'... You don't have suicidal thoughts, you just think, 'It would be easier if I wasn't here.' I needed some help."

So he referred himself to the Priory's 28-day residential programme and took part in AA sessions online at the same time. "It can be a bit easier for a newcomer, you can log on and listen. You can unmute yourself... You can go to four or five a day. You are not short of meetings. If people are craving

a drink, all you have to do is open up your laptop. In the middle of the night, you can join one across the world."

On the other hand, he says some people are not adept at managing online meetings and "you can get lost in it all". He is hoping to attend meetings in person where he says it is easier to forge connections: "You meet people and swap numbers to find sponsors."

The 53-year-old now accepts his problem. "I thought I was in control, I had an ego. Being successful in other parts of my life, I wondered why I couldn't control my alcohol. I didn't want to be defeated by something."

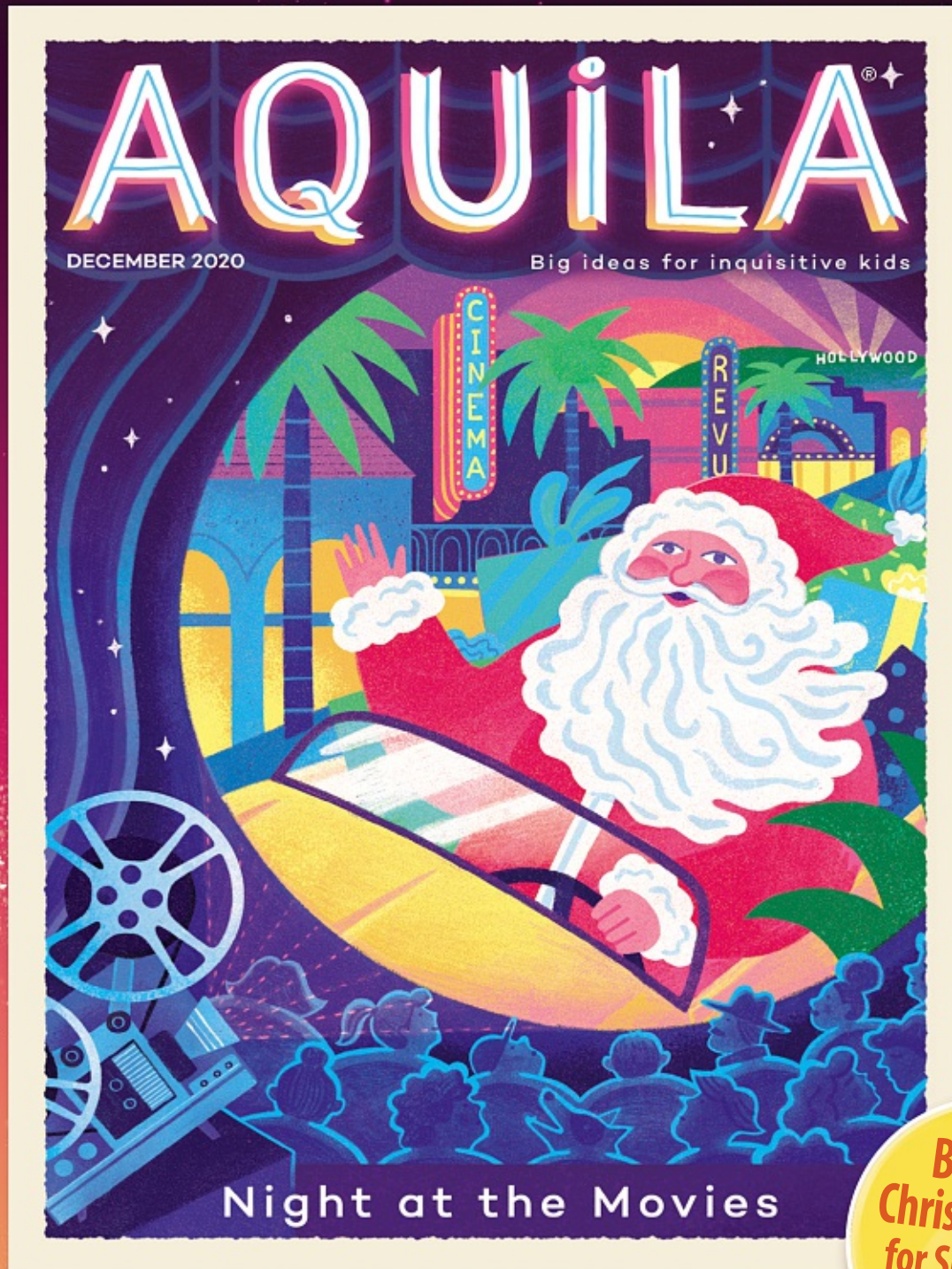
The opportunity for online sessions has been a boon for some. Laura Bunt, deputy chief executive of We Are With You, a drugs, alcohol and mental-health charity, says: "We know that coming into a [physical] drug and alcohol service can be very challenging, it can be stigmatising, [there] can be a lot of shame." The virtual support has been a source of encouragement. "It's been a lesson for us; in future, we might offer more flexibility."

However, some online clients lament the loss of walking out the door after a therapy session and the benefit of the journey home to assimilate what has been discussed. Virtual therapy also inhibits those without access to technology or privacy at home. Dr Emily Finch, vice-chair of the Royal College of Psychiatrists' addictions faculty, says not enough research has been undertaken about the effectiveness of online treatment. "There is a risk in drug and alcohol treatment [that the government concludes] that virtual meetings work – as a way of reducing funding – that is wrong." The Royal College of Psychiatrists has warned that public services dealing with addictions are already overstretched and funding has been cut because of austerity.

A month into the first lockdown, Sam sought help from We Are With You for his cocaine and alcohol use. Because of social-distancing rules in Manchester, he has yet to go to the support groups in person, though he has been attending online sessions for the past six months. New lockdown rules allow in-person meetings in England of up to 15 people.

"I didn't want to change [before] and now I want to do it," he says. He has got a new job driving a van. "I'm really enjoying it. Money isn't everything, I've learnt that. Before I needed to feed an addiction." He enjoys his downtime – fishing, walking his dogs, spending time with his family. "I never wanted to do anything, just go to the pub, lie in bed or use [drugs]." It has meant he has had to lose some of his friends. But it is worth it, he insists. "The best thing is when your mum and dad tell you how proud they are." **FT**

*Names have been changed to protect privacy.
Emma Jacobs is the FT's Work & Careers writer*



Brilliant
Christmas Gift
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LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION!

THE CHRISTMAS ISSUE: Settle back for a night at the movies! Films bring us a special kind of magic at Christmastime — in this issue of AQUILA we look back over 100 years of film history, investigating Stop motion, Sound effects and the Lumière brothers. Discover the story of Disneyland and the real science v. the fantasy of time travel. PLUS: do Black Holes hold a 'film copy' of our Galaxy's history?

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Richard Robinson, Brighton Science Festival



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**'I'll say to everyone
who's thinking
about lip-syncing:
be subversive!'**

John Epperson, creator of Lypsinka

Continued from page 23

queer/nightlife spaces and bringing it directly to political actions, protests, elections... Directly speaking truth to power is fierce drag too."

For Velour, lip-syncing, with its fantastical costumes and outsize emotions, gives LGBT+ people access "to certain stories about glamour and beauty... to be able to put our queer bodies into stories that weren't necessarily written for us," a process that can be "healing or informative or cathartic for the audience and for the performer". It's a question of power, of centring the disenfranchised. But, she adds, when the ordinarily powerful – say, straight white people – do it, appropriating the voices and experiences of artists of colour, "it doesn't have the same transgressive effect" because their stories are already told every day and everywhere.

TikTok - and the technology it has created

– has ushered in a new era for lip-syncers everywhere. People tend to think of it as a video platform, but that's a mistake, says Crystal Abidin, senior research fellow in internet studies at Curtin University in Australia and an expert in internet cultures. On the app, developed by Chinese company ByteDance, "the organising principle is an audio meme," she says.

What makes TikTok so attractive to users, says Abidin, is that they can adapt, repeat and remix other people's sounds into their own videos "with the click of a button". TikTok's technology allows "seamless" syncing of image and audio, "so it really encourages remix culture. It feels, as my grandparents like to say, quite idiot-proof." This means anyone's audio can become your lip-sync track, and while there are plenty of banal videos where people mug along to Cardi B or Megan Thee Stallion, there are more potent lip-syncs available too.

In a video to celebrate liberal congresswoman Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, @livmerth puts on

make-up and, over a rap beat, lip-syncs to AOC's powerful speech about being intimidated by a fellow politician: "Representative Yoho put his finger in my face, he called me disgusting, he called me crazy, he called me out of my mind." The video has had one million views on Twitter.

More gleefully, from the @saintswante account, two young women dance in front of a news story about Donald Trump confirming that he had Covid-19 while lip-syncing the upbeat chorus from the song "Cell Block Tango": "He had it coming... He only had himself to blame." It has had 1.8 million views.

There have been concerns that TikTok censors some political videos. Last year The Guardian published details of former guidelines for the company's moderators that encouraged them to censor videos mentioning Tiananmen Square or Tibetan independence. Since then, TikTok has told the FT that it "doesn't limit political content except in extreme cases such as hate speech".

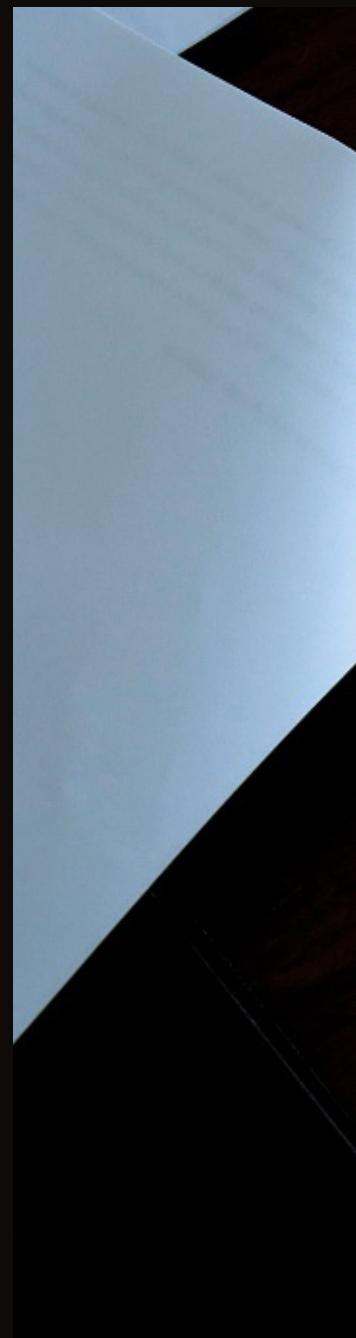
Sarah Cooper's latest Trumpian lip-syncs seem subject to the law of diminishing returns. In one, where she lip-syncs to the president talking about whether Joe Biden is on drugs, her character gets progressively deeper into a bag of white powder and ends up with it all over her face, hair and clothes. It is all too on-the-nose, so to speak, to be truly funny.

Even so, that queer instinct at the heart of lip-syncing – to detach image from essence, to satirise and subvert power, to manifest a kind of glamour whether chic, seedy or slinky – is clear from lip-sync's protagonists. The lip-sync has now broken into the mainstream where it continues to offer personal and political expression with flair. Whatever the next TikTok is, I have no doubt that lip-syncing will pop up on it with its customary perfect timing. **FT**

.....
Josh Spero is associate editor on FT
Weekend Magazine

THE 26-YEAR HUNT FOR AFRICA'S MOST WANTED MAN

Accused of organising, financing and directing the Rwandan genocide, Félicien Kabuga was one of the world's highest-profile fugitives. Then, after decades on the run, he was apprehended in a Parisian suburb earlier this year. How did he evade capture for so long? And how was he found? *Tom Wilson* reports



WANTED FOR GENOCIDE



FÉLICEN KABUGA
Former Minister of Justice, Rwanda
1994-1995

Accusation:
Financed the Massacre of Rwanda's Men, Women, and Children

Rewards of up to U.S. \$5,000,000 are offered for information that leads to the arrest or conviction of persons indicted by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda for genocide, crimes against humanity, and crimes against property. If you have information about Félicien Kabuga, please contact Emeraux by phone or email. For more information, visit our website at www.rewardcenter.org.
CALL NOW 877-334-4635 or 673-353-3338
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UP TO U.S. \$5,000,000 REWARD

Pas de prime pour l'arrestation de Kabuga : le Rwandais a été capturé sur la base d'une traque technique et non grâce à un informateur.
Selon Emeraux, la traque de Kabuga a été relancée il y a un an, lors d'une réunion à La Haye sous l'égide du Mécanisme. Les membres de sa famille sont alors placés sous surveillance par les polices.

It was January 2003 and US special agent Scott Gallo had not heard from his Kenyan informant for more than 24 hours. He was anxious.

The informant, a 27-year-old journalist turned government fixer named William Munuhe, had approached the US embassy in Nairobi some weeks prior offering information about one of Africa's most wanted men.

Félicien Kabuga, a Rwandan businessman accused of organising, financing and directing the Rwandan genocide nine years earlier, was living in Kenya, protected by certain members of the government, the informant said. Not only had he seen the fugitive, but he had been working for him, helping a small group of Kenyan security officials move him from safe house to safe house.

In the days that followed, Munuhe was interviewed by Gallo and took a lie-detector test, before later proposing he could lure Kabuga, then nearing 70, to his home in return for a piece of a \$5m US government reward. He had promised to call Gallo once the fugitive was with him, but almost two days had passed and now the US special agent was outside the small two-storey apartment building and everything was quiet.

A Kenyan police officer climbed up the drainpipe, over a low black railing, on to a balcony and forced open a blue door on the first floor. The officer came back down the stairs and let Gallo and his team in. "As you walked in, there in the living room, on a coffee table, were all these photographs of him and his girlfriend, his family, almost like a shrine, like he was saying goodbye," remembers Gallo.

As the group climbed the stairs, a police officer went ahead and opened the door to a bedroom. On the bed, lying on his back, was Munuhe. "Blood had drained through his body, through the mattress, on to the floor," Gallo says. "There was so much blood that it had already started to pool all the way out to the door." Munuhe's forearms and calves were swollen and his ankles and wrists were bruised, suggesting that he had been tied down, Gallo adds.

The Kenyan coroner ruled that Munuhe had died from asphyxiation, citing the presence of a small charcoal burner in the room. The coroner, says Gallo, ignored the pools of blood the special agent had stepped over as he entered, the hole in one of Munuhe's temples and the missing fragment of skull - about the size of a US quarter - that American officials noticed during the autopsy.

Munuhe had died by suicide, Kenyan officials said, but the US embassy had a different view. "It was an execution," says Johnnie Carson, US ambassador to Kenya at the time of the operation. "Gas didn't kill him. He had been assassinated." And Kabuga, on the run since his indictment by the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (ICTR) in 1997, was nowhere to be seen.

How could an ageing Rwandan businessman in poor health continue to evade a tribunal backed by the vast resources of the UN? Who was protecting him? How long had he been in Kenya and where had he gone next? Kabuga's story is a cautionary tale of the world's pursuit of suspected war criminals and the power and weakness of international justice.

Seventeen years later, after an astonishing swoop on Kabuga in a quiet Paris suburb in May - the result of co-operation between law enforcement agencies from at least nine countries - answers to those questions are finally starting to arrive.

By the time Kabuga was arrested, Interpol had recorded more than two dozen aliases for him and identified multiple passports. When he was detained in Paris, he was using a passport from the Democratic Republic of Congo, according to the French police. When he received medical treatment in Frankfurt, Germany, 13 years earlier, he used Tanzanian papers.

The passport documents were authentic, investigators said, demonstrating how easy it remained for wealthy criminals to procure official identities in certain countries. The hunt had also been dogged, at different times, by the reluctance of several African governments, including Kenya, to assist the ICTR in tracing individuals, assets and identities, they said. (The investigators declined to be identified because they were criticising the conduct of another country.)

Now 85 years old, Kabuga has denied all charges against him. He was frail when he arrived in court in France after his capture and spoke through an interpreter. Sometimes he appeared to lose his train of thought. But a DNA match confirmed it was the same man that UN prosecutors allege helped fund, plan and orchestrate the killing of 800,000 ethnic Tutsis and moderate Hutus in 100 blood-soaked days in 1994. The same man that went on to evade detention for more than two decades, slipping across international borders again and again.

"The arrest of Kabuga demonstrates that we can succeed when we

'You wouldn't have had killings in every town, in every commune, in every village... were it not for [Kabuga's radio station]'

Stephen Rapp, former chief of prosecutions at the ICTR

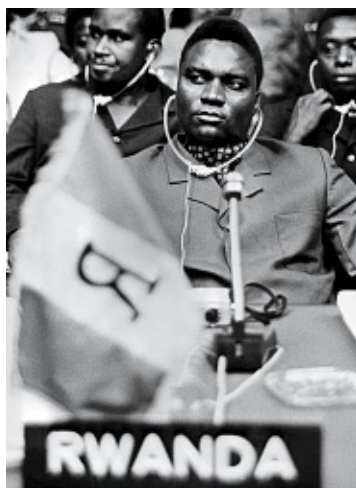
have the international community's support," says Aimable Havugiyaremye, the head of Rwanda's National Public Prosecution Authority, who as a 21-year-old soldier was a member of the rebel Tutsi army that helped to end the killing in 1994. "It is a reminder for all those who are responsible... that even after 26 years they can be brought to account."

Kabuga was born in a province in northern Rwanda, close to the Ugandan border. From humble beginnings hawking cigarettes and second-hand clothing, he built a thriving business selling spices, salt, sugar and tea before moving south to the capital, Kigali. By the time Major General Juvénal Habyarimana seized power in a coup in 1973, Kabuga's reputation as a businessman had grown and he later cemented his position at the top of Rwanda's political and commercial elite through the marriage of one of his daughters to one of Habyarimana's sons.

Like Habyarimana, Kabuga is a member of the Hutu ethnic group that today represents about 84 per cent of the country and controlled political power after independence from Belgium in 1962 at the expense of the Tutsi minority. The terms Hutu and Tutsi had existed in the sophisticated Rwandan kingdom that predated colonial rule but were used to denote lineage rather than ethnicity and people could move between groups, for example through marriage.

But in 1935, the year Kabuga was born, the Belgian colonial administration codified the groups, introducing identity cards that described each Rwandan as either a Hutu, a Tutsi or a Twa, a much smaller ethnic minority. The Belgian rulers favoured the Tutsi for positions in the colonial administration, driving a wedge between the two communities. As independence approached, Rwanda's nascent political scene split along ethnic lines. The first clashes between Hutus and Tutsis broke out in 1959, before a predominantly Hutu government took power in 1962 and hundreds of thousands of Tutsis fled into exile.

Anti-Tutsi discrimination continued for the next three decades, peaking again in the early 1990s after a rebel Tutsi army invaded Rwanda from the north, provoking the first organised killings of Tutsi civilians by Hutus. Into this febrile atmosphere, Félicien Kabuga - by then one of the country's richest men with assets estimated in the tens of millions of dollars - launched Radio Télévision Libre des Mille Collines (RTLM).



Former Rwandan president Juvénal Habyarimana in 1975

Pitched as the country's first private radio station and an alternative to the state-run Radio Rwanda, UN prosecutors allege that it was conceived, from the outset, as a vehicle to fan ethnic hatred and exterminate the Tutsi population.

"I am one who strongly believes that RTLM was really key to the width, breadth and depth of the genocide," says Stephen Rapp, a former chief of prosecutions at the ICTR who successfully prosecuted Kabuga's RTLM associates, Ferdinand Nahimana and Jean-Bosco Barayagwiza, at the court in 2003. "You wouldn't have had killings in every town, in every commune, in every village... were it not for the air support that RTLM provided to that campaign."

Not only did RTLM spew anti-Tutsi messages from July 1993 but after Habyarimana's plane was shot down on April 6 1994 and the mass killing of Tutsis began, it broadcast the location of Tutsi groups and urged Hutus to "find and kill", according to Kabuga's indictment.

Liliane Umubyeyi, a Tutsi, was 15 in April 1994. She says she remembers the RTLM broadcasts as if she had heard them yesterday. Tutsis were cockroaches to be feared and despised, RTLM broadcasters repeated in the months leading up to the genocide. "There was a change from the day the RTLM was introduced," she says. "Hatred intensified to a level when it was uncontrollable."

When the armed Hutu men came for her family, she says, choking back tears, many of them carried small wireless radios - the portable type that took batteries and were common across Africa before the arrival of the mobile phone.

She was the only one who escaped, to the top of a nearby tree, where she listened with her eyes closed as the armed Hutus hacked her extended family, including her mother, father and younger brother, to death. The RTLM broadcasts urged "no mercy for the Tutsi", she says.

The impact of the rolling, terrorising radio messages on Umubyeyi and others in hiding was profound. "They did it deliberately," she says. "Once you have fear, you can't defend yourself; once you're scared, you can't even think of how to escape."

Kabuga was not just president of RTLM, the indictment says, with "de jure control of all programming, operations and finances". Among other charges, prosecutors allege that he chaired meetings of the funding group established by Hutu leaders to finance the Interahamwe killing squads; that he used his businesses to import "a record number



A photo display of genocide victims at the Kigali Memorial Centre

'He's not the only one that played a role... but he's one of the masterminds'

Aimable Havugiyaremye, Rwandan prosecutor general

of machetes" and uniforms used by the Interahamwe; and that his vehicles transported Tutsis to a location where they were killed. "He's not the only one that played a role... but he's one of the masterminds," alleges Havugiyaremye, the Rwandan prosecutor general.

Emmanuel Altit, the French international lawyer leading Kabuga's defence, said his client denies all the allegations. "The burden of proof rests on the prosecutor," he said, declining to answer, on behalf of Kabuga, other questions about his client's decades on the run.

Serge Brammertz knows how to catch fugitives. The 58-year-old Belgian prosecutor has chased criminals for three decades. In July 2008, as head of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, Brammertz oversaw the arrest of the Bosnian Serb leader-turned-fugitive Radovan Karadzic, who had committed genocide during the Bosnian war of 1992-95; he was finally caught in Belgrade hiding out as an alternative healer. Later, in 2011, Brammertz arrested another Bosnian leader, the military commander Ratko Mladic, also known as the Butcher of Belgrade, who had been on the run for 16 years.

Brammertz took on the hunt for Kabuga and the other Rwandan fugitives sought by the UN in 2016 when he was appointed chief prosecutor for the International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT) - a combined court established by the UN to conclude the outstanding cases from Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia.

By 2015, when the Rwandan tribunal was closed down, it had indicted 93 individuals for their role in the genocide and convicted 62, including some of the most senior members of the former Rwandan regime, pioneering the development of an international criminal justice system. But it had also become the subject of strong criticism for inefficiency, huge expenditure - it spent an estimated \$2bn between 1994 and 2014 - and the glacial pace of many of its proceedings.

"I don't think there's any jurisdiction anywhere in the world that if you did a comparable assessment of the price and the number of people involved that would say the investment was a good return," said Tim Gallimore, a spokesperson for the ICTR prosecutor between 2004 and 2008, in 2015.

In the case of Kabuga in particular, many critics ask why he was not found sooner. "If the search had ►

◀ been serious, or if there had been better co-operation, he could have been captured earlier,” says Alain Gauthier, a French citizen who, with his Rwandan-born wife, has helped to track genocide suspects living in France since 2001. “I think everyone was convinced that he would never be found.”

When Brammertz arrived, the UN investigators were working with 83 informants, chasing down reported sightings in dozens of locations around the world, from Kenya to Madagascar, Gabon to the Indian Ocean island-nation of the Comoros. The court’s tracking team was continually on the road, meeting sources in distant cities who claimed to have seen Kabuga or have information about his location. But the work had led nowhere and hard intelligence was scarce.

“The problem is most often you really cannot trust people,” Brammertz says over a video call from The Hague. The failure of the network of informants to deliver accurate intelligence meant that by 2016 much more was known about Kabuga’s first decade on the run than his second.

After the rebel Tutsi army led by Paul Kagame – now Rwanda’s president – marched into Kigali in July 1994 and ended the killing, Kabuga fled along with millions of other Hutus across the border into the Democratic Republic of Congo, then known as Zaire. From Congo, prosecutors say that he travelled to Switzerland with his family, where he was granted a visa and was able to access funds in international bank accounts, before his application for asylum was rejected and he was deported in August that year.

Speaking to reporters in a hotel room in the Congolese capital Kinshasa shortly afterwards, Kabuga – in the last known recording of the fugitive for 26 years – denied any role in the genocide. “We invested in a simple commercial radio,” he said calmly through his daughter, who sat next to him and translated. “We just wanted the radio to be a success.”

From Congo, Kabuga travelled to Kenya, whose president Daniel arap Moi had been close to Habyarimana and where many officials from the former Rwandan regime had fled. With what prosecutors now assume was at least Moi’s tacit support, Kabuga immediately set about rebuilding his commercial interests, establishing an import-export business and acquiring property.

Moi later denied any friendship with Habyarimana or any knowledge of Kabuga, but UN prosecutors say there is strong evidence that



SOURCE: FT RESEARCH

Kabuga on the run

1 April-July 1994

Genocide against the Tutsi in Rwanda kills 800,000; Félicien Kabuga’s radio station broadcasts incitement

2 Summer 1994

Kabuga flees to Zaire/Democratic Republic of Congo

3 August 1994

Kabuga flees to Switzerland

4 August 1994

Kabuga is deported back to Kinshasa, DRC

5 1995

Kabuga and his family reportedly set up a business and acquire property in Kenya

June 2002

US says Kabuga is believed to frequent Kenya, Europe, and countries including Madagascar and Gabon; it offers a \$5m reward for information leading to his arrest

6 January 2003

Informant William Munuhe, who told the US he had helped Kenyan officials hide Kabuga, is found dead in Nairobi, Kenya

7 July 2003

Kabuga, using Tanzanian papers, attends a hospital appointment in Frankfurt, Germany

8 May 16 2020

Kabuga arrested in Paris

some senior officials in Moi’s administration, most likely for reasons of money rather than politics, aided and abetted Kabuga for almost a decade. In April 1998, Kabuga was traced by the UN tribunal to four properties in Kenya, three of which belonged to one of Moi’s nephews, Hosea Kiplagat, according to a report by the think-tank International Crisis Group. In the police operation that followed, several Rwandan fugitives were detained but Kabuga was tipped off, investigators believe, and he slipped away. Kiplagat, now in his seventies, said he did not remember the allegation and declined to comment further.

Frustrated by the lack of progress, the US shifted gears in June 2002, announcing a \$5m reward for information leading to Kabuga’s apprehension and plastering his face across the Kenyan media. It was then, with his eye on the reward, that Munuhe contacted the US embassy.

sat down with this informant, William [Munuhe], and we spent at least an hour and a half, two hours going back and forth, and in many ways he appeared very credible,” says special agent Gallo. More important for the embassy staff was the sudden appearance, days later, of a second

source, a Kenyan schoolboy, who reported that he had seen Kabuga get into a government-plated vehicle in a residential district of central Nairobi.

As the US planned its next steps, the circle of people who knew of the two informants’ testimonies was kept as small as possible to avoid leaks, both Gallo and former US ambassador Carson say. Munuhe had said he was working for Zakayo Cheruiyot, Moi’s powerful permanent secretary for internal security, and that any leak – particularly to the Kenyan police – was likely to get back to Cheruiyot. But the circle must not have been tight enough, Gallo says, and soon Munuhe was dead and Kabuga was gone.

In the aftermath of Munuhe’s death, the schoolboy was moved to the US for his protection, Gallo and Carson say. Cheruiyot told the Kenyan media that he had known Munuhe but never met Kabuga and denied US allegations that he had been hiding the fugitive. The newly elected government of Mwai Kibaki also insisted it had no knowledge of the Rwandan’s whereabouts. Cheruiyot declined to comment further. “I have made my position perfectly clear,” he said recently, before hanging up the phone.

In the diplomatic community, opinion was split. Carson believed the scrutiny provoked by the killing had forced Kabuga to leave Kenya; he suggested Kabuga had then sought protection in a French-speaking west African country before moving to Europe. Rapp, the former ICTR prosecutor, was less convinced the Rwandan had severed his ties. Later, as US ambassador-at-large for war crimes, Rapp says he still received intelligence that Kabuga had been in Kenya.

It did not help that international justice is always an uphill battle, Brammertz says, pushing countries that are required to co-operate under the UN charter to actually help. “We still have today problems in getting requests for assistance executed in a number of countries in the African region,” he says.

With some countries, such as South Africa, the resistance is sometimes political. The tribunal sought the arrest of a Rwandan fugitive there in 2018 but relations between the two governments had deteriorated following the assassination of a former Rwandan intelligence chief in Johannesburg by suspected Rwandan operatives.

More often it is a problem of creaking bureaucracy. While the tribunal owns the arrest warrant and is often the only entity actively looking for its fugitives, it lacks prosecuto-

rial powers to arrest suspects, surveil conspirators or subpoena information and must rely on co-operation from local law enforcement.

Historically, the ICTR, based in Tanzania, would have to submit requests for law enforcement assistance in another country to the appropriate embassy in the Tanzanian capital. That embassy would transmit the demand to its foreign ministry in its national capital, which would then pass the demand to the justice ministry, which would forward it to the police. “It would be months between the time you put in the request and the country actually doing anything about it,” says Rapp, remembering how the French police once ran surveillance on another suspected Rwandan fugitive in Paris four months after he had asked for it.

It meant that by the time Brammertz was handed the Rwandan brief in 2016, the trail had run cold. He knew he would need a different approach.

Brammertz has dark hair, flecked with grey, and an energetic way of speaking. He started his career as a national magistrate in Belgium, supervising cases involving organised crime, terrorism and drug trafficking, before climbing the ranks of the country’s judiciary. He holds a PhD in international law but also a masters degree in criminology. “The investigative aspect is my real passion,” he says.

At the IRMCT, he immediately set about reshaping his team. He hired Bob Reid, an Australian investigator whom he knew from their time together tracking war criminals at the Yugoslavian tribunal, and decided to return to Kabuga’s last known whereabouts – the University Hospital in Frankfurt.

In 2007, German officers arresting Kabuga’s son-in-law, Augustin Ndirabatsire, a former Rwandan minister of planning who has since been convicted of incitement to commit genocide, had recovered a thumb drive that he tried to destroy. Downloading the data, it revealed an image of a hospital bill for a second man, using Tanzanian papers, who had undergone an operation in the city earlier that year to remove a benign tumour from his throat. That man, they determined, was Kabuga.

Poring over medical and immigration records, it was clear that Kabuga, using the same Tanzanian identity, had also received medical treatment in Germany in 2003 and perhaps had a stronger network in Europe than was previously suspected. Phone records showed that

‘No one who committed that kind of crime should go unpunished’

Liliane Umubyeyi,
genocide survivor



From top: Eric Emeraux, head of the French police unit that deals with genocide and war crimes; IRMCT chief prosecutor Serge Brammertz

Kabuga had been spooked by his son-in-law’s arrest, leaving Frankfurt for Luxembourg and then Belgium before the trace was lost, according to Brammertz.

“The more we then looked at the support network and the family, the more we were convinced that all family members were living in Europe,” he says, adding that as time passes, the number of people a fugitive can rely on tends to wither, leaving them with only the most loyal family members for support.

More certain that he was on the trail of his target and eager to avoid the bureaucracy of individual requests for assistance that had derailed previous operations, Brammertz called a rare meeting of European security agencies in The Hague in July 2019.

In the months that followed, the European partners, supported by Interpol and Rwanda’s National Public Prosecution Authority, fed information to the tribunal. Then at the start of 2020, the UK’s Metropolitan Police identified one of Kabuga’s daughters travelling under her married name to mainland Europe. Initially, the pan-European team thought she was going to Belgium but slowly a pattern of movement began to materialise, according to Eric Emeraux.

Emeraux was then the head of France’s Office for Combating Crimes Against Humanity, Genocides and War Crimes (he also produces electronic music in his spare time under the moniker Matthias Ka). In 2019, after the meeting at The Hague, the unit launched its own investigation under French law and was eventually able to use cellphone tower analysis to track the movement of seven members of Kabuga’s family who lived in or around Paris or travelled there regularly from the UK and Belgium.

After analysing the data and sharing it with the UN tracking team, they saw that the family’s activity centred on one specific suburb of northern Paris, Asnières-sur-Seine. “We looked at the movement pattern for the entire year and we saw that for every single day of the year one of the children from the UK, from Belgium or from France was locked in at a specific cell tower,” says Brammertz.

As the team closed in, French police identified an apartment rented by one of the family and financial records of a large payment from a family member to a nearby hospital. A copy of a Congolese passport used by the patient bore the name Antoine Tounga and a picture of a man that Emeraux thought could have been Kabuga.

As the coronavirus pandemic swept through western Europe in the spring, restricting the family’s movement further, French police staked out the property and at dawn on May 16 more than a dozen officers in black combat uniforms stormed the small third-floor apartment.

“I had mixed emotions,” Emeraux says of the moment he came through the door and realised the man the world had chased for 26 years was in front of him. “A feeling of relief to have not failed, and a feeling of pride for the people of Rwanda.”

Kabuga’s lawyers have petitioned for the trial to take place in The Hague, citing his poor health. If the request fails, he will be transferred to the tribunal’s headquarters in Tanzania for a trial likely to start towards the end of 2021.

Genocide survivors, such as Ahishakiye Naphtal, who was 20 in 1994 and now heads an umbrella group of survivors’ organisations in Kigali, have asked that the proceedings take place in Rwanda so more survivors can participate, though they are unlikely to be successful. “To try Kabuga [in Rwanda] is the real justice,” he says.

Not everyone thinks it would be a just trial. Rwanda has tried over two million genocide suspects in grassroots *gacaca* courts, in some cases fairly. But over time, efforts by Kagame’s Rwandan Patriotic Front to suppress dissent and dictate how the genocide is remembered have led to charges of “genocide ideology” and divisionism against prominent government critics, rights groups say.

Given Kabuga’s age and poor health, prosecutors and victims alike hope the trial will come swiftly, wherever it takes place. “No one who committed that kind of crime should go unpunished,” says Umubyeyi, who now lives outside Oxford, England.

For Brammertz, who was reappointed in June as prosecutor of the IRMCT for another two years, Kabuga’s capture was a moment of triumph: “I knew immediately what it would mean for survivors and victims.”

But his hunt is not over. The tribunal’s last “major fugitive”, Protais Mpiranya, the former commander of the presidential guard, remains at large, living, investigators suspect, in southern Africa and travelling, most likely, between Zimbabwe, South Africa and Congo. The US has, again, offered a \$5m reward for information leading to his arrest. Brammertz, again, is in hot pursuit. **FT**

Tom Wilson is an FT world news editor

'I WANT TO SAY SOMETHING ABOUT ORDINARY BLACKNESS'

When Ghanaian-born British artist and film-maker John Akomfrah first picked up a camera in the 1970s, it was as an act of resistance. Ever since, his work has given presence to the overlooked and oppressed while exploring themes of myth and memory. As he prepares a new London show, he talks to *Bonnie Greer*. Portraits by *Adama Jalloh*





Above: stills from *Handsworth Songs* (1986) by John Akomfrah and the Black Audio Film Collective.
Below: *Four Nocturnes*, Akomfrah's commission for the Ghana Pavilion at the 2019 Venice Biennale

The British brought people over from Africa and the Caribbean to work. Then my generation got born. An unintended consequence, I suppose," says artist and film-maker John Akomfrah. Born in Accra, Ghana, in 1957, he has lived in the UK since he was a child after his family had to leave for political reasons: "We kids, nobody knew quite what to do with us."

For Akomfrah and other young African and Afro-Caribbean men, London in the 1970s was a dangerous place. "I would say, for example, that a white man said something to me, and I was told that it didn't happen. Just didn't happen." There was an attempt, he says, "to clean up the streets of black men. It wasn't safe. I wasn't safe. I got off the street."

The unexpected consequence of this was that the teenage Akomfrah started to go to the local repertory, the legendary Paris Pullman, not far from where he grew up in Parsons Green. It showed, among others, Bergman, Antonioni, Renoir, Bertolucci, Oshima, Fassbinder. "They had Raoul Walsh one day, [Jean-Luc] Godard the next. I was safe. Nobody else was there. I always felt free and on my own. It was glorious.

"Then one day I realised something. I realised that Godard, [François] Truffaut and all the rest were in a kind of private conversation that didn't include me. That not including me was actually the point of the conversation. I took up the camera. It was, for me, a kind of shield."

That led him into his long career and his latest show, *The Unintended Beauty of Disaster*, at London's Lisson Gallery: an exploration of the themes of Akomfrah's life - beauty, race, all the media of film-making.

"I started in the 1970s with a bunch of mates doing O-levels. We went through the system and just decided to stick together," he says. Sticking together led to the creation of the influential Black Audio Film Collective in 1982, with artists such as David Lawson (who joined in 1985) and Lina Gopaul. Akomfrah continues to collaborate with them.

The Collective's first film, *Handsworth Songs* (1986), examined the events and the lives involved in the social-justice uprisings in Birmingham and London of the previous year. For black film-makers and artists especially, *Handsworth Songs* was as influential as Godard's *Breathless*. It was quite simply, for us, a new way of seeing.

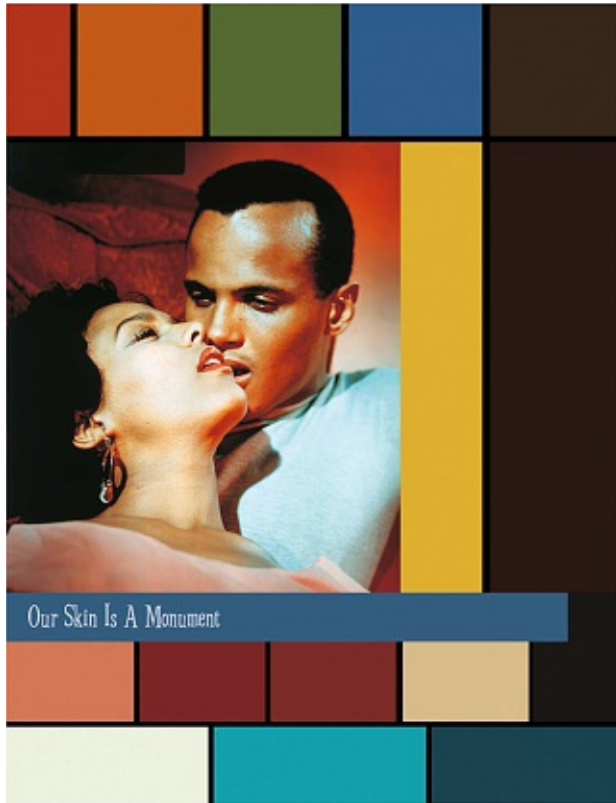
Handsworth Songs uses a combination of newsreel, still photos and archive footage. This way of making film is one of the hallmarks of Akomfrah's technique: an accumulation of image and sound and feeling. It generates one of his goals - the discovery of unintended beauty. His work does not lecture, does not harangue. It is witness. It is his encounter with real ancestors, but also with those he calls imaginary ancestors - the ones he takes for himself. Without apology.

"I picked up these imaginary ancestors like [artist JMW] Turner. It's his cinematic eye. I love that about him. So he and I would have this private conversation. Then the time comes when you have enough imaginary ancestors, and knowledge, and you go out on your own. Your journey."

The show at Lisson examines Akomfrah's journey, his encounter with the world outside and his interior world, a mélange of questions and searching. Always searching.

Four Nocturnes (2019), commissioned for the inaugural Ghana Pavilion at the 58th Venice Biennale, is the third part of a trilogy of films that explore the intertwined relationship between the destruction of the environment ►





Left: Akomfrah's 'photo-text'
'Our Skin Is a Monument I' (2020).
Below: stills from *Triptych* (2020)



'ONE DAY I REALISED
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THE NEW AGENDA



'THERE IS ALWAYS, FOR ME, THIS KIND OF DISCONTINUITY AND CONTINUITY. I TRY TO FIGURE OUT THE SPACES IN BETWEEN'

Akomfrah photographed on the roof of his London studio, October 2020

◀ and the destruction of humanity. The film meditates on loss and mortality, myth and memory, using the rapidly declining elephant population of Africa.

Fragments are a motif of the film-maker: "I'm used to being made up of fragments. Deposits. Sometimes people ask me what it's like being on the 'inside'. I have relatives on the 'outside'. So I'm not completely 'inside'. I can work with these fragments of myself. Because for me, it's about The Work and serving The Work, and helping others to work."

The show also features new photographic works based on Akomfrah's recent "Our Skin Is a Monument I" (2020), part of whose proceeds support emerging UK-based black and ethnic-minority curators. The piece referred to black Hollywood stars and how film crews used only white actors when considering colour levels during shooting. The photographs are an example of Akomfrah's continuing interest in monuments – the title is taken from an essay published in The New York Times in June this year in which the African-American writer Caroline Randall Williams suggests that the skin of black Americans is the real monument to the

Confederacy, the pro-slavery side of the US Civil War, in the way that it embodies histories of enslavement and abuse.

"I wanted to make this film in the USA, in Lowndes County, in the South," says Akomfrah. "I wind up on this small black farm. And it could have been rural Nigeria, the faces, the voices. Everything. There is always, for me, this kind of discontinuity and continuity. I try to figure out the spaces in between."

The Black Lives Matter protests, which spread across America and then around the world, have occupied Akomfrah's imagination too. A new three-screen film work at Lisson Gallery entitled *Triptych* responds indirectly to the social-justice movements of 2020. "I kept looking at these pictures of Breonna Taylor. She was just an ordinary person. An ordinary woman. And then comes this extraordinary violence. Extraordinary. I want to say something about ordinary black folk. About ordinary blackness." **FT**

.....
'The Unintended Beauty of Disaster' opens in January at Lisson Gallery, 67 Lisson Street, London NW1. From November 9-22, John Akomfrah's 'Signs of Empire' is on the gallery website, lissongallery.com



Ravinder Bhogal Recipes



Wurst case scenario

What shall I cook for dinner tonight? It's a perennial quandary. The endless possibilities are thrilling and dreaming up meals is one of life's great pleasures. Even though I cook at my restaurant, making supper at home is something altogether different - and sacred.

For many cooks, this is a gentle activity, accompanied by the musical clatter of pots and pans, the seesaw of a knife on a wooden board and the symphony of something good simmering in a pot. Not for me.

Before we were wed, my husband had romantic ideas about us cooking together. We'd be a modern couple who would share the domestic burden, pouring Barolo to sip while chopping the soffritto for the ragù. Ours would be an egalitarian and peaceful kitchen run by two people in love. It was a nice fantasy.

He soon discovered that I am an alpha cook. I run a terrifying dictatorship over my kitchen island with a bossiness I would never display at work. From forensically taking apart the pantry to make a detailed shopping list to deploying my full culinary prowess so we can eat the glossiest pool of risotto Milanese on an unassuming Tuesday night, I am all ferocious concentration and efficiency, gnashing tongs and teeth.

My husband's approach is much more laidback. A mercurial daydreamer, he never makes a shopping list and when he cooks, he uses every kitchen implement. It is mayhem, a nonstop circus of burnt onions, overcooked fish and cluttered work surfaces. We teeter on the edge of a wedlock war zone... So this one-pot sausage wonder could be saving our marriage.

Is there a more straightforward ingredient than a sausage? Just lay them into a pan, add heat and they will practically cook themselves. Along with some vegetables or a starch, they are just the ticket for those nights when all you want to do is eat something that tells you all is right with the world without too much fuss or frippery. They may be the very definition of simplicity, but humble sausages, with a little help from a larder well stocked with global ingredients, can go well beyond ordinary bangers and mash.

For this recipe, I use north African lamb merguez sausages, bursting with paprika, coriander and cumin, but you could use any you like as long as they are not too lean. As they cook, they ooze their spice-tinged fat into the sticky sauce made with pomegranate molasses and red wine. It's perfect for mopping up with shop-bought flatbread, which can be warmed in the toaster. Without the drudgery of a pile of dishes to wash, there's more time to relax, drink wine and enjoy marital bliss. **FT**

Ravinder Bhogal is chef-patron of Jikoni in London; jikonilondon.com. Follow her on Instagram @cookinboots

Lamb sausages braised with pomegranate molasses and shallots

Serves 4

- 1 tbs olive oil
- 250g baby shallots or onions, peeled
- 1 stick of cinnamon, broken up
- 1 star anise
- 8 lamb sausages
- 125ml red wine
- 50g pomegranate molasses
- Dash of salt and ground black pepper
- 1 heaped tbs sumac
- 1 handful of finely chopped flat-leaf parsley
- 1 tbs toasted pine nuts

Serving suggestion

- Lebanese flatbread

1 — Preheat the oven to 200C/ gas mark 6.

2 — Heat the oil in an ovenproof pan, add the shallots and gently colour over a moderate heat. Add the cinnamon stick and star anise and cook till fragrant.

3 — Add the sausages and cook, turning frequently until they have some colour all over. Splash in the wine and pomegranate molasses. Season with sea salt and pepper. Increase the heat and stir until the sauce begins to come together and the sausages are coated. Remove from the hob and place in the oven for 35 minutes, turning the sausages halfway through the cooking time.

4 — Once out of the oven, sprinkle with sumac, chopped parsley leaves and garnish with toasted pine nuts. Serve immediately with warm puffs of flatbread.

Photographs by Aaron Graubart





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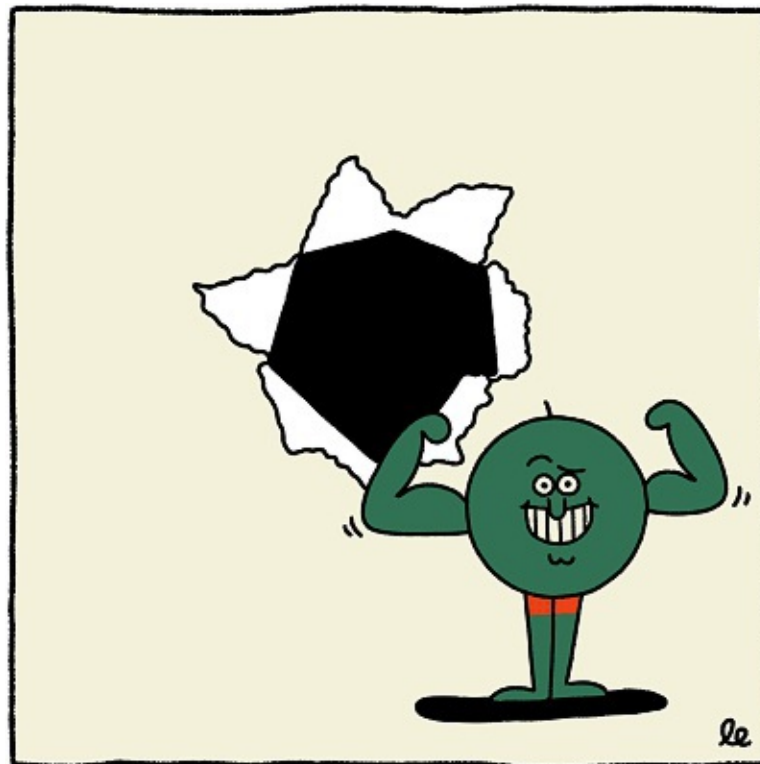
Having just tasted a dozen wines made from the fashionable Grenache grape in McLaren Vale, South Australia, I looked up what my friend James Halliday had to say about the grape in his 1990 *Australian Wine Guide*. (Halliday is Australia's best-known and most experienced wine writer. Aged 82, he has only just relinquished full responsibility for the annual *Halliday Wine Companion* that rates virtually every wine made in the country.)

The section at the beginning lists 116 grape names. But of Grenache there is no mention, so *infra dig* was it considered then in Australia – fit only to supply raw material for cheap fortified wine.

But what should I find emblazoned on the smart brochure that accompanied the recent tasting? A quote from Halliday: “Grenache is McLaren Vale’s secret weapon – not merely Australia’s best, but every bit as good as that of the Rhône valley.”

For many years, Grenache was associated almost exclusively with the southern Rhône and Provence in south-east France. It is the dominant ingredient in Châteauneuf-du-Pape, Gigondas, Vacqueyras, Côtes du Rhône and a host of other appellations in the southern Rhône valley. Naturally quite pale, Grenache is also the main ingredient in the current tidal wave of Provençal rosé. (Typical southern Rhône reds are big and beefy – spicy, deep-coloured and rich – often thanks to blending with deeper-coloured grapes such as Syrah and Mourvèdre.)

Yet almost as much Grenache has been planted in Spain – where it is called Garnacha – as in France and Spanish producers have spearheaded a new style of red wine based on the variety. Reds no longer need to be dark to be admired, opening the door for Garnacha, which is relatively transparent, but fresh and sweet,



As imagined by Leon Edler

with floral aromas, often of roses – a less expensive alternative to delicate red burgundy.

This new style of wine has brought fame to the Gredos mountains west of Madrid. It is fashioned from ancient Garnacha bush vines, which can be found in many Spanish wine regions. Carefully handled, Garnacha fruit has yielded truly fine – and often underpriced – wines in Calatayud, Navarra, Cariñena and Campo de Borja. Even in Rioja, a Tempranillo stronghold, an increasing number of wines based on the also-ran Garnacha grape are being produced, particularly from old vines.

‘This year, the average price of a tonne of Grenache grapes in Australia was higher than for any other major grape’

Grenache is unusually resistant to vine-trunk diseases, which explains why there are so many mature plants all over the world. It also copes well with drought.

This strength has prompted re-evaluation of the variety in South Africa, particularly in the unirrigated interior wine regions such as Swartland. There, star performers David & Nadia (the brand name of a talented married couple) have decided to give up other red-wine grapes to concentrate on the Grenache that they have seen riding out heatwaves and droughts with ease.

You might think this would make Grenache suitable for California’s many vineyards and you’d be right. As Patrick Comiskey wrote in his 2016 book *American Rhône*: “In the mid-1990s, as the American Rhône movement kicked into high gear, producers scoured the state for bona fide Rhône varieties already planted in California. They were ►



Some delicious Grenache and Garnacha

- Paniza, Terrenal 2019
Vino de España
£6 Marks and Spencer 14.5%
- House of Dreams 2019
Swartland
£9 Marks and Spencer 13.5%
- Los Cardones, Estancia
Tigerstone 2018 Salta
1,030 pesos Ozono Drinks,
Buenos Aires 14%
- Frontonio, a range
of Garnachas
IGP Valdejalón
From £15 Winebuyers
- Bernabeleva, Navaherreros
2017 Vinos de Madrid
£15.19 Gauntleys of
Nottingham, £19.99 Hay
Wines, £21.99 Selfridges 14%
- Malmont 2015 Côtes
du Rhône
£19 Stannary St Wine Co
13.5%
- Sierra Cantabria Garnacha
2016 Rioja
£18.85 The Great Wine Co
15%
- Verum, Ulterior Parcela
No. 6 2017
Vino de la Tierra de Castilla
£19.95 The Great Wine Co
14.5%
- Carsten Migliarina 2017
Wellington
£19.95 Yapp Bros 13.5%
- David & Nadia 2019
Swartland
£120 for six bottles in bond
Justerini & Brooks 13.5%
- Birichino, Besson Vineyard
2018 Central Coast
£24.50 Vinoteca, £27.95
Field & Fawcett, £28.99
Majestic, £29.50 Butler's
Wine Cellar 14%
- Ministry of Clouds 2018
McLaren Vale
£33 RRP Master of Malt,
D Vine Cellars, Elicité, Eight
Stony Street, The Good Wine
Shop, Theatre of Wine, Red
Squirrel 13.9%
- SC Pannell, Old McDonald
2017 McLaren Vale
£40 RRP Cru London,
Vinum, Exel Wines, Lay &
Wheeler 14.5%
- Thistledown, This Charming
Man 2018 McLaren Vale and
Thistledown, Sands of Time
2018 McLaren Vale
Both £44 Noble Green, Hedley
Wright and, by the case, The
Fine Wine Co. US importer
Southern Starz 14.5%
- Whitcraft, Stolpman Vineyard
2018 Ballard Canyon
£48 The Sorting Table 13%
- Yangarra, High Sands 2017
McLaren Vale
£86 RRP UK importer
Boutinot, SKr795
Systembolaget, many
stockists in Australia 14%

Tasting notes on Purple Pages of JancisRobinson.com.
Some other stockists on Wine-searcher.com

◀ somewhat surprised to learn that Grenache was everywhere around them.” The variety had rarely been identified on labels but was yoked into service instead as raw material for plonk, high yields camouflaging the grape’s intrinsic character.

Randall Grahm of Bonny Doon was one of the first to celebrate California Grenache in his Clos de Gilroy from Monterey. Today, truly individual interpretations of Grenache can be found throughout the state and especially in the Sierra Foothills and the Central Coast.

In Italy, Grenache is grown almost exclusively on Sardinia, where it is known as Cannonau. Sardinians and Spaniards vigorously dispute who grew it first, but it’s clear from Antonella Corda’s wines, for example, that the transparent new style can be found on the island.

So what about Australian Grenache? Having come late to the modern Grenache party, the Australian winemakers who now take it seriously have been able to learn from those who came before – those, for example, who experimented with small, new oak barrels for ageing and realised that Grenache much prefers large oak casks or concrete. As elsewhere, some of the grape stems are often kept in the fermentation vat to add zest.

McLaren Vale has adopted Grenache more than anywhere

‘Grenache is unusually resistant to vine diseases, which explains why there are so many mature plants’

else in Australia, partly because it can boast so many old vines on the sort of sandy soils that suit it well.

I asked Halliday why Grenache was missing from his 1990 list. He didn’t explain but emailed fascinating evidence of the variety’s rehabilitation in Australia. This year, the average price of a tonne of Grenache grapes was A\$1,209 (£660) – higher than for any other major grape.

Unfortunately, for the variety to express itself fully the wines tend to be quite high in alcohol, but two of the 12 McLaren Vale Grenaches I tasted were under 14 per cent, and very delicious too. The lowest, 13.5 per cent, was one of three Thistledown wines made by British Masters of Wine Giles Cooke and Fergal Tynan. In their quest to become “the authority on Australian Grenache”, they admit to being inspired by Spanish Garnacha.

The mystery perhaps is why the new, delicate style is so difficult to find in the grape’s French heartland, the southern Rhône. **FT**

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FT Weekend





TIM'S GUESTS, FROM LEFT: DAVE ARNESON, MADDY PRIOR, CLAUDE SHANNON, LIN OSTROM AND FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE

FANTASY DINNER PARTY

TIM HARFORD

Florence Nightingale and the co-creator of Dungeons & Dragons share rare beef sliced thin on a battered ping-pong table with the FT's Undercover Economist

I don't believe in keeping my guests waiting to eat, so it all starts with a first course to more than take the edge off the appetite: chips from Frituur No 1 in the centre of Antwerp, fried twice in beef tallow, scalding hot but cooled with mayonnaise. The fries are accompanied by a glass of Westmalle Tripel, indisputably the finest beer in the world, and brewed just a few miles from where we are enjoying it.

We eat standing, gathered round a couple of chest-high tables in a half-outside, half-inside space near the counter. The Westmalle beer is nearly as strong as champagne, so I anticipate a convivial spirit will emerge, even without the help of **Claude Shannon**. Shannon was the father of the information age: in two revolutionary pieces, published either side of the second world war,

he explained how electronic circuits could perform logical operations, then delivered a fully formed theory of information and how it could be transmitted and compressed.

I imagine Shannon is the man to get the party started. Maybe he has brought one of his robots, a chess board for a blitz game (he was good enough to make world champion Mikhail Botvinnik sweat), some juggling balls and a unicycle. Shannon once set himself the task of juggling while unicycling, balanced on a tightrope - but only managed two out of the three. Perhaps tonight will be the night.

I am hoping that Shannon will hit it off with **Florence Nightingale**. She would attend dinner parties with the statistician Adolphe Quetelet and the designer of the proto-computer Charles Babbage, so she might feel comfortable meeting another computer pioneer. Nightingale is most famous as a nurse but was also a pioneer of statistics and data visualisation. She used them as persuasive tools, achieving life-saving policy changes in the teeth of the British medical and military establishment. She was the first female member of the Royal Statistical Society. I'm an honorary fellow myself and hope the connection gives me a

conversational "in" with one of the most formidable of all Victorians. But I am a little nervous.

No such concerns with **Lin Ostrom**, the first woman to win a Nobel memorial prize in economics. ("I won't be the last," she noted and, as so often, she was right.) Ostrom was famous for her ability to work with communities from all over the world, and with scholars

'Shannon once set himself the task of juggling while unicycling, balanced on a tightrope'

from any discipline. She disarmed any opposition with home-made hamburgers, but this evening that should not be necessary.

We walk across the square in front of Antwerp's grand cathedral. I've arranged for dinner to take place in a private first-floor room in one of the great merchant houses overlooking the square. For reasons that will become apparent, the meal is served on a battle-scarred ping-pong table.

We sit and eat our appetiser: creamy burrata cheese, the insides runny enough to slurp through

a straw, with rich green olive oil, salt and cracked peppercorns. It is accompanied by sparkling water at room temperature. After the Westmalle Tripel, we must pace ourselves.

Our cook is Laddawan Thurston of Oli's Thai in Oxford. She has flown in specifically to prepare the next course: a fiery salad, bursting with citrus and chilli heat, with beef grilled rare and sliced thin. It is the perfect dish to cut through the fats and the booze; but then, it is simply the perfect dish. We sip cold Chang beer in an effort to douse the flames on our tongues.

Then, a pause to soak in the view and to talk. I'm rather shy, but feel confident that my guests will find plenty to debate. To reassure myself further, I have invited **Dave Arneson**, a fellow geek. He is a computer programmer who should have much to discuss with Shannon and Nightingale. But he is more famous, at least in certain circles, for co-creating Dungeons & Dragons, the pioneering role-playing game.

I love role-playing games. They are richly creative, and also so baffling to the uninitiated that it is pointless for me to try to explain them here. In some ways, what Arneson invented was as strikingly original an act of creation as Shannon's information theory.

For hundreds of years, this wonderful form of play was trapped in the adjacent possible, waiting for Arneson and his friends to imagine it in around 1970. The game took shape each week seated around a ping-pong table in Arneson's parents' basement. Why them? And why then? Ostrom, a keen observer of how communities come together to collaborate, might offer insight.

This evening, that ping-pong table must groan under the weight of a mighty main course: *schnitzel werdenfeler*, a double-decker pork schnitzel with cream, mustard and onions providing the filling in the meat sandwich. It is served with a side of *kartoffelsalat* and a *dunkel* (dark) beer.

We stroll back into the square for an espresso and *dolce salato* ice cream with almonds, miraculously transported from Sanelli's Gelateria in Salsomaggiore. There are plenty of calories to burn off and I am hoping to persuade my final guest, the folk singer **Maddy Prior**, to perform something that will get us all moving. Shannon plays jazz clarinet; Ostrom was from a musical family. I fancy that even Florence Nightingale might be persuaded to dance into the night. **FT**

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Games



A Round on the Links by James Walton



All the answers here are linked in some way. Once you've spotted the link, any you didn't know the first time around should become easier.

1. Which footballer was the Fifa World Player of the Year in 1998, 2000 and 2003?

2. In 1849, which soldier became the first US president never to have held any previous political office?

3. On which river is the Victoria Falls?

4. In 2012, the communications technology company

Saasbee changed its name to what?

5. What was the state religion of Persia before the arrival of Islam?

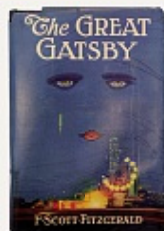
6. In Greek mythology, who was the father of Helen of Troy (left)?

7. What is the American-English word for a courgette?

8. What was the first name of *The Great Gatsby* (below) author F Scott Fitzgerald's wife?

9. Which two puppets joined Channel 4's *The Big Breakfast* in 1992?

10. The great-grandfather of which British newsreader fought against Lord Kitchener's forces at the Battle of Omdurman?



The Picture Round by James Walton

Who or what do these pictures add up to?



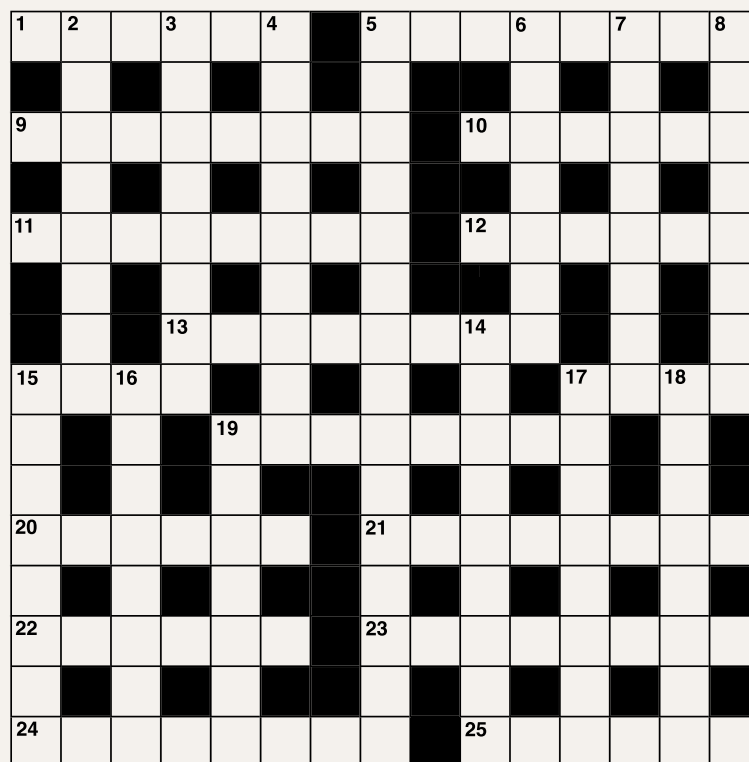
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= ?

Answers page 8

The Crossword No 513. Set by Aldhelm



The Across clues are straightforward, while the Down clues are cryptic.

ACROSS

- 1** With added sharp flavourings (6)
- 5** Prophetic (8)
- 9** Hard shell (8)
- 10** Slumbering (6)
- 11** Criterion (8)
- 12** Renowned (6)
- 13** Worked slavishly (8)
- 15** Netting (4)
- 17** Vended (4)
- 19** Male horse (8)
- 20** Inflict, force (6)
- 21** In a basic way (8)
- 22** Scram! (2, 4)
- 23** Inspiration for *Evita* (3, 5)
- 24** Expecting a baby (8)
- 25** Spring festival (6)

DOWN

- 2** Business expense includes function (8)
- 3** Tribal conflict about tavern that's put up (8)
- 4** Artist made endless changes for Shakespeare, perhaps (9)
- 5** Too many buildings cut into event – removed haphazardly (15)
- 6** Sauce for a crust cooked with a bit of dripping (7)
- 7** Hide displaced one, for example, with gold ring (3, 5)
- 8** Right to go over stormy deep sea for source of oil (8)
- 14** Get rid of choice boxing in Massachusetts, oddly (9)

- 15** Inventing beauty procedure (6, 2)
- 16** Chemical mixed up with lathes (8)
- 17** Footwear smugglers? (8)
- 18** Release broken stool in shelter (3, 5)
- 19** Keep American dishonour on the outside (7)

Solution to Crossword No 512





GILLIAN TETT

PARTING SHOT

How can Big Tech best tackle conspiracy theories?



During the 2016 US election campaign, a conspiracy theory known as #Pizzagate went viral on right-wing websites.

The theory, which claimed that Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton was involved in a child sex ring run from a Washington pizza restaurant, seemed laughable. Until a #Pizzagate believer used an assault rifle to fire at the restaurant.

Thankfully, nobody was hurt. But the episode raised two questions that remain pertinent four years on amid continued political polarisation: why do conspiracy theories proliferate? And is there a way to counter them effectively?

America's tech giants have done extensive research into this subject, largely based on big data analysis and supplemented with insights from psychologists. But last year, a team of researchers at Jigsaw, a Google arm, joined forces with ethnographers at the consulting company ReD to take a different approach: face-to-face qualitative research that explored the attitudes of 42 conspiracy theorists in the UK and US in relation to ideas that ranged from the seemingly benign (say, that the earth is flat) to the dangerous (the white genocide theory) and, most recently, to pandemics.

Some of this material remains under wraps. But the Jigsaw and ReD team recently presented broad findings to a group known as Ethnographic Praxis in Context - and they are thought-provoking.

The key issue is how you approach conspiracy theorists. As Joseph Uscinski, a political scientist at the University of Miami, has pointed out, it is not clear that conspiracy theorists are more prevalent today than they were in earlier eras. "It's a continuity," he says.

But what makes our modern age striking is how quickly conspiracy theories can spread on the internet, and get picked up by mainstream media (and some politicians). Tech groups try to stop this with tactics that YouTube executives call the "four Rs": removing dangerously misleading content; relegating such material in search results; raising better offerings in search rankings; and rewarding groups that debunk conspiracies. (The remarkable metabunk.org, created by science writer Mick West, is an example of the latter.)

This "four Rs" approach suggests that the issue is separating dangerous conspiracies from less dangerous ones. But according to the Jigsaw and ReD research, this may not be sufficient.

When the ethnographers tracked conspiracy theorists, they realised that what mattered most was not whether theories were dangerous, but the degree to which people did (or did not) have an overwhelming attachment to them. "It is more important to distinguish between types of theorists rather than types of conspiracy theories," their paper explained.

People who were deeply in the grip of a conspiracy mentality were as likely to believe benign

conspiracies as dangerous ones - there is "no such thing as an innocuous conspiracy per se", the researchers noted. But some people could be persuaded out of their ideas - so that even the dangerous theories they held became less threatening.

The team therefore suggested the need for a multi-tier strategy. Those deeply gripped by conspiracies will not accept logical counterarguments, but they may respond to emotional cues that are presented with empathy and respect (as West has also argued). Meanwhile, wavering theorists can sometimes be influenced by "upstream"

'What makes our age striking is how quickly theories can spread on the internet'

interventions (say by elevating material that rebuffs conspiracy theories in search engines).

Either way, what causes someone to become hooked on a conspiracy theory is not just a result of individual psychological issues (although these play a part) but of social affiliations too. In Montana, the team studied "Jennifer", who embraced conspiracy theories because these defined her friendship group.

Anyone hoping to debunk these ideas also needs to think hard about cultural signals. Take website design. Twenty-first century professionals typically give more credibility to information that comes from sites that look polished. Conversely, the ethnographers discovered that conspiracy theorists are more likely to believe information that comes from scruffier, amateurish sites, since these seem more "authentic". This point may not be obvious to techies at places such as Google - and is not the type of insight that big data analysis will reveal. But it is crucial.

Can such insights be harnessed by tech companies to avoid future #Pizzagates? There have been small successes: the research describes how one user, "Lois" in San Diego, backed away from a conspiracy theory linked to chemtrails (the exhaust fumes emitted by planes) after Google elevated alternative material to the top of the search engine.

It will not be easy to scale these up, however, or to counter the speed at which new conspiracy theories keep morphing. (The debunked #Pizzagate theory recently resurfaced unexpectedly on social media platforms - this time dragging in the singer Justin Bieber.)

This is particularly alarming when you consider that Uscinski's research suggests that 51 per cent of Americans now partly believe at least one of the major conspiracy theories floating around; and that, with Covid-19 and its putative vaccine, we are witnessing a potent new source of conspiracy ideas - irrespective of the US election. **FT**

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